

## Summary of Dunhuang and Silk Road Coin Seminar

Lamao Zhuoma Liu

Dunhuang Literature Research Institute, Dunhuang Academy, Lanzhou, Gansu 730030, China

---

### Abstract

**This paper summarizes the research results of "Dunhuang and the Silk Road Coins" academic seminar, which consists of five parts. They were: 1. Study on tangible coins of the Silk Road; 2. Archeological findings of coins the Silk Road, four papers; 3. Coins trade exchanges of the Silk Road, six papers; 4. Culture exchanges of the Silk Road, two papers; 5. Using coins of the Silk Road to demonstrate history, religion, and other aspects. It showed the recent achievements of Dunhuang studies and the context of the new silk road, the wide coverage, fully shows the scholars in a new perspective in the study of the silk road coin.**

### Keywords

**The Silk Road; The Silk Road Coins; The Integration of Cultures.**

---

### 1. Preview

The Silk Road originated in ancient China and was a great artery for the exchanges of material and spiritual civilization between ancient China and the West, and a bridge for trade and commerce between Asia and Europe. Commercial trade in various periods promoted the development of the Silk Road. The exchange of trade cannot be separated from money (coins). Coins, which was the important medium for trade and communication, witnessed and recorded that cultures from countries and regions along the Silk Road mutually interacted through business exchanges and other activities. In the meantime, the Silk Road was also a melting pot for the integration of various religions and cultures, leaving many marks reflecting religious culture on the coins. With the continuous development of the Silk Road, the coins left along the Silk Road contain a huge amount of information. They reflect the economic and life, power change, cultural transmission and religious transmission along the Silk Road, and witness the material and cultural exchanges between the East and the West as well as the development of politics and economy. Dunhuang has been the junction of Eastern and Western civilizations since ancient times. In the frescoes of The Mogao Grottoes, there are many reflections of the coins that belong to the Silk Road. In addition, a large number of documents unearthed in Dunhuang, as well as precious cultural relics such as Persian silver coins and the Western Xia silver coins, reflect the developed multi-culture of the Silk Road. Coins study in the west belongs to major disciplines. The history behind coins is more important than coin itself. Through the coins, social change, economic development, culture exchanges, science and technology innovation, etc. What matters more is that coins are indispensable for religious culture. The art study cannot be done without coins, such as Buddhism, Zoroastrianism. Although coins are small, but they are of great significance. They not only record the trade exchanges and communications between the East and the West, but also reflect a large number of cultural exchanges and integration information, which is a window to see the cultural exchanges and integration between the East and the West in the history of the Silk Road. In the West, coins and seals together constitute a major discipline, but in the classification of Chinese subjects, there is hardly a place for coins.

In order to promote the development of China's monetary history and the in-depth study of the Silk Road coins, "Dunhuang and the Silk Road Coins" academic seminar, co-hosted by Dunhuang

Academy and Gan Su History Society, undertook by Humanities Studies Department of Dunhuang Academy and Dunhuang Literature Research Institution, was held at the Mogao Grottoes from 29 June, 2019 to 1 July, 2019. There were 46 experts and scholars both at home and from overseas, like Beijing, Shanghai, Hebei, Liaoning, Henan, Ningxia, Xinjiang, Guizhou, Guangxi, Guangdong, Inner Mongolia, Shaanxi, Shanxi, Sichuan, and Macau, Singapore, Azerbaijan, etc., attending the meeting. The opening ceremony was hosted by Yang Fuxue, a researcher of Humanities Studies Department of Dunhuang Academy. Zhao Shengliang, a researcher, dean of Dunhuang Academy, made an opening speech. Professor He Yuhong, dean of College of History and Culture, Northwest Normal University, delivered a welcome speech on behalf of Gan Su History Society. Niu Da, a Senior Research Fellow of Ningxia Institute of Cultural Relics and Archeology, a specialist of the Western Xia coins, and Wu Xiankang, president of Singapore Numismatic Association, addressed the opening ceremony on behalf of the participating scholars. Subsequently, the meeting entered into speech section, which mainly covered two aspects, one was Ancient Coins of the Silk Road and the other was the Relationship between Dunhuang and the Silk Road.

The participants submitted 34 papers, which were divided into 5 categories according to the topics of each expert and scholar and their main contents. They were: 1) Study on tangible coins of the Silk Road; 2) Archeological findings of coins the Silk Road, four papers; 3) Coins trade exchanges of the Silk Road, six papers; 4) Culture exchanges of the Silk Road, two papers; 5) Using coins of the Silk Road to demonstrate history, religion, and other aspects, 8 papers in total.

## **2. Study on Tangible Coins of the Silk Road**

To a large extent, coins are the only historical heritage witnessing all the process of the Silk Road and the details of civilization. Coins clearly reflect all aspects of the societies of the countries along the Silk Road. Therefore, Study on Tangible Coins of the Silk Road received much attention and became the focus of this meeting. A large number of papers were received, thirteen in total.

Jiaozi was the earliest note used in the world. Why and what is the significance of jiaozi's appearance in Chengdu during the Northern Song Dynasty? " Reflections on the Appearance of Jiaozi" by Hou Shixin, chief expert of Sichuan Museum, demonstrates the inevitability of jiaozi's appearance in Chengdu and the significance of Jiaozi in the world financial history through investigation of geographical advantage of Chengdu on the Silk Road in ancient times and its international trade status in foreign civilization exchanges.

According to his studies on the social and economic documents written by Uyghur language and unearthed in Turpan, Li Shuhui of Center for Studies of Ethnic Minorities in North West of China of Lanzhou University explored about the cotton currency circulating in the West Region in his work "Study on the Cotton Currency in the West Region" , including the reasons of its appearance, the time of its application, the currency value, the lending rate and so on. It was pointed that the origination of the cotton currency was the utilization of cord, cotton, silk and raw silk. Cotton money was not only of a certain size, but also stamped with the seal of the King of the Uighur, and the government had a system of regular recycling and renovation. In addition, from the production style, issuing organization, management means and circulation function, it had fully possessed the function of modern currency. It could be said to be the earliest modern currency in China and even in the whole world.

Wang Yongsheng, deputy researcher and the director of the Research Information Department of China Numismatic Museum, also a representative scholar in the study of coins in the Silk Road, wrote the paper "Circular Coin with a Square Hole on the Silk Road and the International Attribute of Five Baht, Kaiyuan Tongbao ". This paper pointed out that "Currency on the Silk Road" was not as same as "the Ancient Currencies along the Silk Road" from the perspective of the West -East trade and exchanges of foreign and domestic cultures. It also analyzed the cultural connotation and its development phases according to the development of the Silk Road and the influence of of the West-East cultural exchange. Meanwhile, taking five baht and Kaiyuan Tongbao for examples, it discussed

their roles as international currency along the Silk Road, and thus illustrated the historical inevitability of the internationalization of RMB.

Wang Yue, associate researcher of Shanghai Museum who is famous for his study on coins on the Silk Road in the academic world, wrote an article "A Brief Review on the Ancient Sassanid Coins Unearthed in Turpan". By comprehensively collecting, sorting and analyzing Sassanian coins, cultural relics and silver coins unearthed in Xinjiang, combining the archaeological material and the unearthed documents, the paper outlined the social and economic living conditions of Turpan, which was an important transportation town between China and Iran from the end of Han Dynasty to the Tang Dynasty. From Late 4th to 5th century AD, non-government trade was mainly bartering, rarely using money. From the mid-6th and early 7th century, due to the stable political environment, Sassanid coins appeared in large numbers in Turpan. This highlighted the actual situation that how ancient China and Iran were linked.

"Research on Sogdiana's Imitation of Chinese Kaiyuan Tongbao Coins" written by associate professor Qi Xiaoyan from Changzhi University, indicated that to a large extent, the issuing of Chinese imitation coins by the Sogdian states was out of political and interest needs, which was a manifestation of the vassal relationship between the Sogdians and the Tang Dynasty, through engaging in textual research of the shape, distribution and inscription of the coins made by the Sogdian states through imitating of the Chinese "Kaiyuan Tongbao" in the 7th and 8th centuries. It also reflected the political condition that the local states were relatively independent from the Tang Dynasty under the vassal relationship. Therefore, Sogdiana's coins not only imitated the characteristics of Chinese coins, but also inherited the western traditions introduced before. This was a process of continuous imitation, innovation and localization, also witnessed the exchange and integration of Eastern and Western civilizations in Sogdian areas.

Yang Yanpeng and Zhou Tao from School of History and Society of Hechi University, wrote "A Preliminary Study on the Copper Coins of Kanishka I". This paper pointed out that Kanishka I transformed Kushan Coins in many ways and strengthened the highlight of Kushan's characteristics through systematically collating and textually studying the title, distribution and types of the coins of Kanishka I on the basis of previous research. Besides, the change of god on the coins of Kanishka I reflected the evolution of religious beliefs during this period.

### **3. Archaeological Discovery of Silk Road Coins**

The four papers on Archaeological Discovery of Silk Road Coins did not stick to the historical documents, but from the perspective of archaeology, combining with the distribution range, number, shape and system of unearthed coins to discuss the coins in a broader original environment. This was a breath of fresh air.

"A map of the regional distribution of ancient coins unearthed in Azerbaijan and their value on the Silk Road" written by Aliyev, a foreign expert in School of Asian and African Studies mainly introduced the general situation of unearthed coins in Azerbaijan and their distribution area, artistic and historical value. It also pointed out that those coins verified that Azerbaijan used to be an important node of Eurasian transportation hub on the ancient Silk Road.

"A Study On Monetaria Moneta In Gansu And Shaanxi" written by Professor He Yanjie of Hebei Normal University, pointed out that the currencies of the two provinces present different characteristics in different times. In this paper, sea shells and imitation shells excavated in Gansu and Shaanxi during the Pre-Qin and Qin and Han Dynasties were collected, the specific data of their excavation sites, quantities, distribution locations were analyzed through making a list, then the characteristics of their circulation areas, quantities and functions were summarized. Literally, there were four characteristics: 1. In the late Shang Dynasty and before, the function of shells in Gansu and Shaanxi provinces was mostly decorative or mouth piece, not currency equivalent, which should be caused by the influence of Qinghai; 2. During the Western Zhou Dynasty, large quantities of real monetary shells appeared in Gansu and Shaanxi provinces, which should be influenced by the

Oriental merchant culture; 3. During the Eastern Zhou Dynasty, the number and location of shells unearthed in the two provinces sharply decreased, and the practical currency function of shells was gradually weakened. The shells were mainly used in the form of burial treasures and decorations, and it was still used as currency only in the areas of Qin people and Xirong in Gansu Province; 4. In the Western Han Dynasty, the shells only existed sporadically in the two provinces, mainly as decorations. The economic base determines the superstructure. The development of religion is guaranteed by a certain material and economic foundations. Li Zhipeng of Gansu Academy of Social Sciences revealed the close relationship between religion and monetary economy in the paper "Religion and Money Economy-- To See The Temples' Support And The Use of Money Through The Unearthed Coins And Materials". It was based on various ancient coins and cellars found in ancient temple sites or underground palaces throughout China in recent years, the economic mode of "supporting" and "self-supporting" of the temple was analyzed at the same time. It led to that currency was the combination of "worldly right" and "divine right". The rise and fall of the currency economy's affected the spreading of religions and the spreading of religions had an adverse effect on the development of secular society.

Wu Xiaohong of Ningxia Academy Of Social Sciences briefly described foreign coins on the ancient Silk Road unearthed in Ningxia, especially the discovery and research of the Sassanian and Persian silver coins and the Eastern Roman gold coins, and indicated that Ningxia region played an important role on the Silk Road.

#### **4. Coin Trade Exchange on the Silk Road**

In "The Foreign Traffic and Trade of Bohai Kingdom in Tang Dynasty from the Perspective of the Silk Road Economic Belt", Professor Hao Qingyun of Northeastern University analyzed six major radial transportation routes centered on Shangjing, the capital of Bohai and believed that this transportation network was one of the hubs that the Silk Road network system in Tang Dynasty extending to the ancient Northeast Asia region. Meanwhile, the form and quantity of trade between Bohai Kingdom, Tang Dynasty and Japan were presented, and the importance of Bohai Kingdom in the trade history of the Silk Road was explained.

Theory of sun yat-sen university doctoral xue-fei han again of the Roman empire east trade in the perspective of red sea trade currency circulation is the number of the predecessors to sesterces on Roman east trade exists serious imbalance questioned, [1] think dinar silver is the real flow of money in the form of trade in goods, but sesterces is only part of the trade in goods value valuation unit to prove this point, the author by Mr Lai loch customs pottery archives By studying the packaging of Roman gold and silver coins and analyzing the unearthed Roman gold and silver coins in India, it is further pointed out that the currency trade between Rome and India is not only an exchange, but also a financial tool to obtain profits, which reflects the economic operation mechanism of The Roman Empire.

After Uighur helped Tang Dynasty with the counterinsurgency on Anshi's Rebellion, the Tang Dynasty and the Uygur developed silk and horse trade with a history of more than eighty years. The academic world had been concerned on this problem for a long time and various works about it had already been done. It was pointed out that the trade between the Tang Dynasty and the Uighur was unfair,[2] but much of the focus was on the commodity form of trade, not the nature of the trade between the two. Concerning this issue, An Yufan, a postgraduate student of Northwest Minzu University, analyzed the geographical environment, living habits, population and economic characteristics of Uighur and Tang Dynasty and concluded that Uighur was a middleman in the trade between China and the West at that time. A huge amount of silk Uighur received every year was mainly sold to the West as commodities via "Uighur Road".

Su Lide, a research of Inner Mongolia Numismatic Society, wrote "A Study On The Currency Of The Grassland Silk Road Trade". In this paper, it was indicated that the Liao Dynasty reclaimed the "Grassland Silk Road" on the northern grassland, which connected the Western Region, Korea, Japan



and other countries with Beijing as the center. Till the Republic of China, this trade channel had promoted the development of the commodity economy and the prosperity of the financial industry in the north and south of Yinshan Mountain and grassland area. However, limited to the special geographical environment, economic foundation and traffic conditions in Mongolia, the original exchange method of bartering was used in the trade, but there were also a small amount of ancient coins such as gold and silver coins, silver, copper coins, paper money in China and Western countries in circulation.

## 5. Numismatic Culture Exchange on the Silk Road

“The Influence of Heterogeneous Culture On Silk Road Coins From The Perspective of Multi-type Characters”, written by a researcher Yang Fuxue of Dunhuang Academy and Zhang Hongjuan of the Shaanxi History Museum, discussed Sino-Kharosthi Coin and other currency coins and pointed out that the Silk Road cultural and economic exchanges were produced by means of language and writing. Under this circumstance, coin culture was inevitably affected by different ethnic cultures and characters along the Silk Road. A large number of existing multilingual coins showed that the ancient ethnic groups along the Silk Road used the languages or scripts of other ethnic groups in different areas and to varying degrees, and contained different cultures. This developed a major feature of coin culture along the Silk Road.

“Currency and Culture Exchange between India and China”, written by Dai Jianbing of Hebei Normal University, presented the history of trade exchanges between China and India from the Han Dynasty to the Republic of China from the perspective of diachronism. It summarized the channels, methods and types of trade between China and India before and after the Silk Road was formed. Simultaneously, this paper demonstrated that the formation of the Silk Road not only strengthened the economic and trade exchanges between China and India, but also strengthened the spread of religions and cultural exchanges and integration between China and India, through taking the ancient Chinese coins unearthed in India since the 1930s and the Indian coins unearthed in Hetian, Xinjiang as proof.

## 6. Demonstration of History and Religion with Silk Road Coins

There are many scholars using coins to demonstrate historical and religious problems besides those studies above. For example, Qi Xiaoqing, deputy researcher of Dunhuang Academy, discussed the combination of sitting statue with crossed-legs in the Northern Dynasty at Dunhuang Mogao Grottoes and their origins in “The Image Combination of Sitting Statue With Crossed-legs in the Northern Dynasty at Dunhuang Mogao Grottoes and the Origin of Kushan”. The author took the cross-legged sitting statues and the fabric folds on the seat backs appearing in the grottoes and stone towers in Hexi, Western Regions and Central Asia as a complete image combination for textual research. With the coin of Kushan Dynasty and the sitting posture of the figure on the statue, it is believed that the image combination of crossed-legs Maitreya Bodhisattva and its high-back seat comes from Kushan and learned from the sitting statue of Kushan Emperor which was popular at that time. This sort of images had double meaning of the statue of emperor and Maitreya Bodhisattva, it reflected the intention of governing the country of the governors. As the image spread to the east, this meaning continued as their spreading.

“The Multi-God Idol Worship of Iranian Religious Beliefs in Kushan Seen from Coins”, written by Yuan Wei of Guizhou Provincial Museum, discussed the multi-god idol worship of the Kushan family of Iranian religious beliefs through studying coins, unearthed cultural relics, unearthed documents with numismatics, historical study methods. It was indicated that during Darouzi time, the emergency of Iranian religious idolatry matched the period of Karkissega and Hoveissegate of Kushan Empire. In the time, Iranian polytheism worship of Kushan was fully established and entered a prosperous period and then declined.

Mi Xiaoqiang, a doctoral student of Institute of Dunhuang Studies of Lanzhou University, studied Kushan coins, tomb relics, shoe buckles worn by figures on statues in “Shoe Buckle Decoration And The Nomadic Origin of Kushan” and proved that shoe buckle decoration was a kind of nomadic customs. Meanwhile, on the viewpoint of the custom of shoe buckle decoration in the Tomb of the Golden Hill of the Darouzi, Kushan, was derived from Parthia, [3]the author proposed different opinion and considered that Kushan's shoe buckle decoration directly inherited from Darouzi and this custom lasted till the end of Kushan. Furthermore, it was deducted that Kushan originated from nomads Darouzi.

Aerzhai Grottoes Temple, in Ordos , Inner Mongolia, is the largest grotto temple complex found in Inner Mongolia, and also the largest grotto temple in China from the Western Xia to the Mongolian-Yuan period. Wang Dafang, a researcher of Cultural Relics Bureau of Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, briefly introduced the basic situation of Azhai Grottoes Temple and speculated the Arzhai Grottoes was once an important site for Genghis Khan’s expedition to the Western Xia Dynasty through studying the historical records. For a long time, the Arzhai Grottoes became an important place for Mongolian nobles to support Tibetan Buddhist monks, pray for blessings and sacrifice to the Genghis Khan family. This is the reason that a picture of "Sacrifice to Genghis Khan Family" appeared in the wall paintings of Cave 31 of Aerzhai Grottoes.

“Several Understandings of the south frontier of Dunhuang in Han Dynasty”, written by Zhang Junmin of Gansu Institute of Archaeology, mentioned that after many field investigations and studies, it was believed that the actual jurisdiction of the south frontier should continue to advance 50 kilometers south to the northern foot of Altun Mountain within the range determined by the former sages. In the meantime, With the help of Dunhuang unearthed bamboo slips and documents, the management method of Dunhuang Nansai was speculated and it was considered that there were only three hou officers and their main mountain passes, Feng Tunnel and small towns except the two hou officers in the Yangguan Prefecture.

The content of this academic seminar mostly focused on the study of coins on the Silk Road and the study of trade and cultural exchanges along the Silk Road, they illustrated the recent new achievements of Dunhuang Studies and Numismatics of the Silk Road. The studies have a large coverage. To sum up, “Civilizations are like water, moistening everything silently”. The entire conference not only concentrated on history, but also focused on reality. It not only spanned time and space, but also transcended countries. With profound thinking and research, it presented an exquisite feast for the study of Chinese currency history and the development of Dunhuang Studies.

## References

- [1] Pliny,NH6.101,Rackham,H.(1942)(ed).pliny,Natural History, ii.Books 3-7(Loeb Classical Library 352). London.
- [2] Z.J.Zhang:Silk and horse trading between Ujur and Tang dynasty and the essence of it,Heilongjiang National Series,vol2(2011),p.74-78. (Liu Zhengjiang: "The Uyghur and Tang Dynasty's Ma silk trade and its essence, "Heilongjiang Ethnic Series", No. 2, 2011, pp. 74-78.).
- [3] Sarianidi V.I.Traces of Parthian Culture in the Cemetery of Tilliya Tape(Afghanistan)[C]//Curtis V.S.et al,ed.The Art and Archaeology of Ancient Persia-New light on the Parthian and Sasanian Empires.New Yoyk:Tauris Academic Studies(1998),p.21.