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CHINESE RELATIONS WITH CENTRAL ASIA, 260–90¹

By MICHAEL LOEWE

The extent and nature of Chinese penetration into Central Asia during the third century and the problems raised by the Chinese and Kharoṣṭhī documents that have been found at the various sites of Lop-nor, Niya, and elsewhere have recently formed the subject of articles by two scholars. Professor Brough has suggested² that the territory of the state of Shan-shan was incorporated into the Kuṣāṇa empire for a short period, perhaps in the middle of the second century, before independent rulers took over control. He believes that a further change was marked by the adoption of the royal title *jīṭumgha* from the seventeenth year of king Aṃgoka, and that thereafter the country was subject to Chinese control (or at least nominally so) for the period of about 60 years until the end of king Vaṣmana's reign; and he suggests that the seventeenth year of king Aṃgoka can be identified with 263. Professor Enoki³ has recently taken the opportunity to revise his earlier theory that the year in question should be identified as 609; and he now believes that the five kings mentioned by name in the Kharoṣṭhī documents should be dated from the middle of the third century to the decade starting in 330.

Both scholars cite linguistic and historical evidence to support their conclusions and to solve some of the problems. While it is not proposed here to submit any further evidence that has a direct bearing, the suggestions that have been made need to be set against the historical developments that were taking place in China at the time. In addition there are certain features of Chinese institutional practice that are perhaps worth examining in view of the technicalities that are concerned.

I venture to differ from the scholars who have been cited in the following respects. (1) The year 263 seems to be too early to mark the start of a period of resurgence of Chinese power in the north-west. In addition to the dynastic changes and military pre-occupations that were taking a dominant place in Chinese politics in the years following 263, there is clear evidence that the area

¹ Abbreviations are used in the notes as follows:

Conrad y A. Conrady (ed. and tr.), *Die chinesischen Handschriften- und sonstigen Kleinfunde Sven Hedins in Lou-lan*, Stockholm, 1920.

CS *Chin-shu* 晉書; references are to the *Po-na-pen* edition (described as a Sung print).

HHS *Hou Han-shu* and *Hsü Han-shu*; references are to the *Po-na-pen* edition (*Shao-hsing*), with the folio numbers of Wang Hsien-ch'ien's edition in brackets.

HS *Han-shu*; references are to the *Po-na-pen* edition (1035), with the folio numbers of Wang Hsien-ch'ien's edition in brackets.

Huang Huang Wen-pi 黃文弼, *Lo-pu-nao-erh k'ao-ku chi* 羅布淖爾考古記, Peiping, 1948.

Maspero H. Maspero (posthumously), *Les documents chinois de la troisième expédition de Sir Aurel Stein en Asie centrale*, London, 1953.

RHA M. Loewe, *Records of Han administration*, Cambridge, 1967.

² *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, xxviii, 3, 1965, 582–612.

³ *Memoirs of the Research Department of the Toyo Bunko*, No. 22, 1963, 125–71.

was subject to the activity or penetration of rebels from before 270 up to 279 ; and the changes in provincial administration suggest that the Chin empire's position in the north-west may have been reduced from 269 but consolidated from 282. (2) I prefer a different reading for the impression of a seal, which would accord more with administrative practice and which does not imply the establishment of a *chiin* or commandery west of Tun-huang. (3) The implications of the term *shih-chung* 侍中 and the evidence of the wooden fragments may require deeper study. The temporal distribution of the fragments is such that no certain conclusion may be drawn therefrom regarding the maintenance or withdrawal of Chinese official posts in the north-west.

THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT

From the beginning of the first century B.C. onwards there were times when Chinese attempts at expansion and colonization in Central Asia were marked by conspicuous successes. Nevertheless the general outcome of these ventures was one of temporary penetration, dependent on local or inconstant factors, rather than one of a well-established Chinese occupation. The Chinese standard histories emphasize repeatedly the dangers that faced a remote Chinese outpost or mission if a local community were to turn hostile ; and it is clear that, in attempting to assess the strength of China in these situations, full attention must be paid to the initiative of the non-Chinese parties, as well as to that of the Chinese administration or its pioneering generals.

Even at the height of Han power no commanderies were established to the west beyond the Yü-men and Yang Barriers ; and further east, along with the four commanderies of Wu-wei, Chang-i, Chiu-ch'üan, and Tun-huang, there existed territories which could not be incorporated into normal Han administrative arrangements, and which enjoyed the special status of *shu-kuo* 屬國, or dependent states.⁴ West of the Barriers the highest power of Han administration was vested in the Protector-General (*Tu-hu* 都護). This title had first been established in 59 B.C.,⁵ with the intention that the holder should co-ordinate Chinese activity and control among the states of the Northern and the Southern Routes ; and it is evident that some of the states on those routes would sometimes appeal to this official for help in time of emergency.⁶ The title does not appear to have been held after A.D. 23. Another senior Chinese official, the *Wu-chi hsiao-wei* 戊己校尉, was appointed from time to time ; but the authority of this officer was considerably less than that of a Protector-General

⁴ For the status and situations of the dependent states, see *RHA*, I, 62.

⁵ i.e. with the appointment of Cheng Chi 鄭吉, *HS*, 19A.13a (23b) and *HS*, 96A.2b (7b). Chü-yen strip 118.17 (*Chü-yen Han-chien t'u-pan chih pu*, p. 95 ; *Chü-yen Han-chien chia pien*, no. 678) refers to Chi 吉, a colonel who had been commissioned to protect Shan-shan and the area to the west, and also uses the term *Tu-hu* 都護. This strip mentions dates in 64 and 62 B.C. The last recipient of the title *Tu-hu* before the Eastern Han period was Li Ch'ung 李崇 (*HS*, 96B.23a (36a) ; and *HS*, 99B.35b (30b)).

⁶ *HS*, 96B.8b (10b) and 20b (33b).

and his sphere of activities was more limited.⁷ Reference will be made below to the existence of these or similar posts after the end of the Han dynasties.

As a mark of the success of Han policy in Central Asia Chinese historians noted the conferment of official Han titles, together with the use of insignia (seals and seal-cords) on dignitaries serving in the small states, and the admission of the sons of such kings at Ch'ang-an or Lo-yang, to serve as attendants at the court or as hostages.⁸ Such service was described by the terms *shih* 侍 or *chih* 質.

During the Eastern Han period, Chinese ventures depended for their success on fortuitous or inconstant factors and were marked even less by permanent results. Successful ventures in these remote areas could hardly be expected to have occurred during the dynastic decline and administrative weakness that accompanied the final decades of the Han period. Similarly, the period of the Three Kingdoms of Wei, Shu-Han, and Wu (220-64), which ended in the ascendancy of the Ssu-ma family in Wei and its establishment of the Chin dynasty from 265, was hardly more propitious. In considering the third and fourth quarters of the third century, i.e. the particular time to which Professors Brough and Enoki have drawn attention, it is necessary to bear in mind the changes of dynastic fortune, the adoption of different administrative institutions in the provinces of the north-west, and the degree of control which the Chinese were able to exercise in that area.

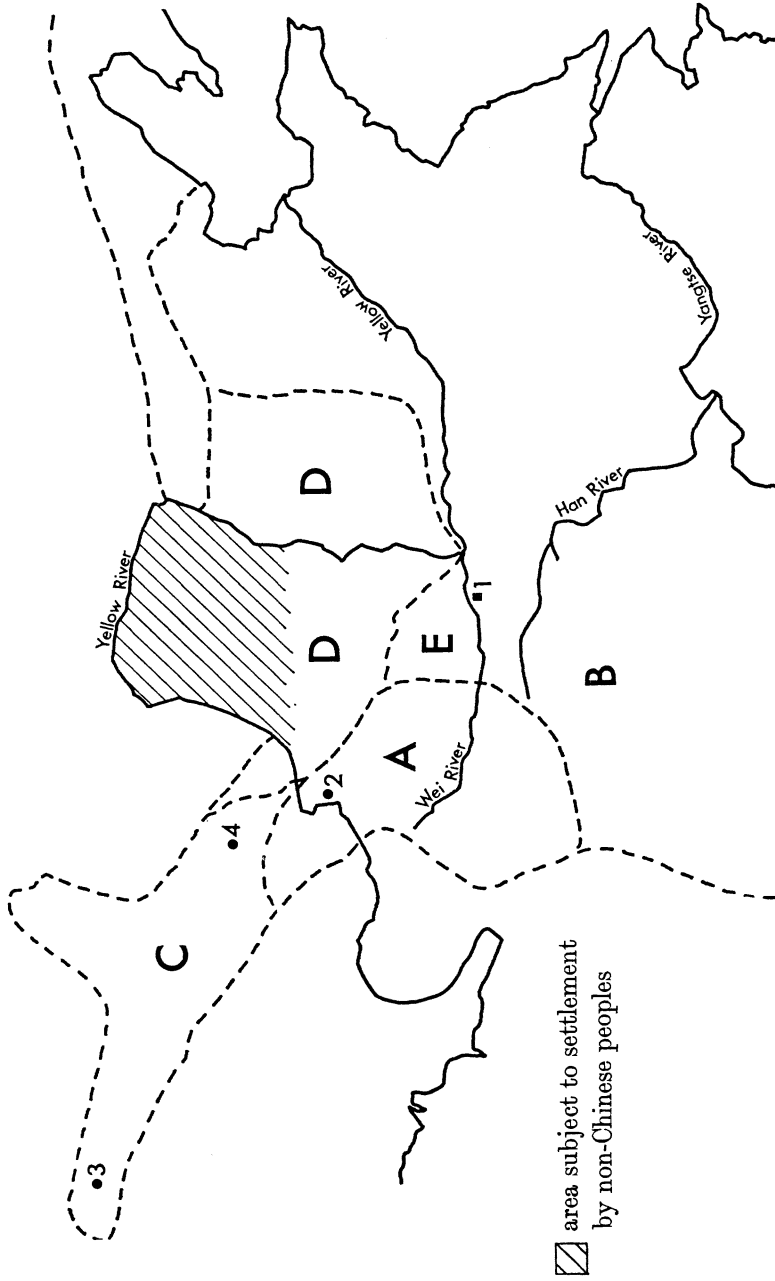
In the first half of the decade that began in 260, Wei was occupied principally in fighting the forces of Shu-Han, with a view to bringing that kingdom under its own domination. For this purpose, in 263 the governors of three commanderies that lay to the west of Ch'ang-an (T'ien-shui 天水, Lung-hsi 隴西, and Chin-ch'eng 金城) were ordered to leave their own areas to take part in the campaign;⁹ and it would be somewhat surprising if, among the events and dangers that are recorded for those years in the *Chin-shu* 晉書, the government would have had effort to spare for furthering Chinese influence in the north-west. As yet the Ssu-ma family had not achieved complete domination, as it was only in 263 that Ssu-ma Chao 司馬昭 received the title of Chin kung 晉公, to be followed by that of Chin wang 晉王 in 264, and his assumption of the title of emperor in 265. From now onwards the main effort of the Chin empire was directed against overcoming Wu, but this objective was not finally achieved until 280.

In the meantime some unease was being expressed at the capital city regarding the potential danger to security that was presented by the large numbers of foreign immigrants who had been settled in north China. These

⁷ Established in 48 B.C.; *HS*, 19A.13b (23b). In the Eastern Han period there were variously one or two of these officers. See Kyoto index to *HHS*, p. 663.

⁸ The total number of Han titles held in the Western Regions is given as 376 in *HS*, 96B.23a (36a). Examples of the despatch of hostages to the Han court or the attendance there of sons of the kings of the west are seen in *HS*, 96A.4b (12a), 16a (34a), and 18b (38a); and in *HS*, 96B.8a (10a) and 13a (20a).

⁹ *CS*, 2.8a.



Chin Empire: the divisions of the north-west, 269-82 (after Wada)

Names mentioned in the text include:

- A Ch'in-chou 秦州 1
- B Liang-chou 梁州 2
- C Chin-ch'eng 長安 3
- D Liang-chou 涼州 4
- E Ping-chou 并州 4
- Yung-chou 雍州 4
- Wu-wei 武威 4

were the non-Chinese tribesmen who were living in various parts of modern Shensi and Kansu, and further east beyond the Yellow River. In 268 Fu Hsüan 傅玄 expressed his fears of the outcome should they be joined by elements of the more dangerous people, the Hsien-pi.¹⁰ Some years later similar fears were voiced by Kuo Ch'in 郭欽, who was afraid of infiltration and the occupation of commanderies within the interior;¹¹ and as late as 299 Chiang T'ung 江統 was making a plea for the removal of foreign elements away from the metropolitan area towards the north-west.¹² In doing so he referred to the dangers that might have arisen c. 264-7, owing to the increased strength of the foreign elements then settled in Ping-chou 并州.

Like the Han empire, the Chin empire was organized in commanderies (*chün* 郡) which were grouped together in *chou* 州 for the purposes of inspection and some supervision, and the Chin government sometimes appointed military officers to take command of forces or campaigns in a particular *chou*. Whatever the exact significance of creating these divisions, and however they affected the exercise of civil and military control, it is of interest to note that in 269 a new arrangement was adopted, whereby five commanderies that had been within Yung-chou 雍州, together with Chin-ch'eng 金城 (formerly within Liang-chou 涼州) and Yang-p'ing 陽平 (formerly in Liang-chou 梁州) were separated to form a new division of Ch'in-chou 秦州. This arrangement was maintained until 282, when Ch'in-chou was incorporated in Yung-chou 雍州.¹³

The list of administrative divisions and units that is given in *Chin-shu*, 14, evidently takes account of the situation that followed this reversion, as Chin-ch'eng is included there among the eight commanderies that were within Liang-chou 涼州.¹⁴ A later administrative change possibly points to the maintenance or even growth of Chin authority in these areas. In 295 a further commandery was created by detaching five prefectures (*hsien* 縣) from Tun-huang and one from Chiu-ch'üan, and, by what is perhaps a more significant step, by the foundation of two new prefectures; this new commandery was named Chin-ch'ang 晉昌, and the name is perhaps not without significance, if only as a propagandist gesture. A few years later (301-2) a proposal was made by Chang Kuei 張軌, the Regional Inspector (*Tz'u-shih* 刺史) of Liang-chou; he suggested that a commandery of Wu-hsing 武興 should be founded to the north-west of Ku-tsang 姑臧, by settling elements of a displaced population there. He also proposed the foundation of another commandery in the area, named Chin-hsing 晉興.¹⁵ Subsequent events show that these actions or proposals should not necessarily be dismissed as gestures that were void of

¹⁰ *CS*, 47.3b.

¹¹ *CS*, 67.11a; probably between 271 and 284.

¹² *CS*, 56.1a et seq.

¹³ *CS*, 3.5b and 3.12a.

¹⁴ *CS*, 14.14b et seq.; the other seven commanderies were Hsi-p'ing 西平, Wu-wei 武威, Chang-i 張掖, Hsi 西, Chiu-ch'üan 酒泉, Tun-huang 敦煌, and Hsi-hai 西海.

¹⁵ *CS*, 14.15a.

power or real significance, and that they may reflect some measure of administrative consolidation. For on the collapse of the Chin dynasty and its flight to the south (317) it was in the north-western area, i.e. Liang-chou, that Chang Kuei's successors were able to establish themselves as an independent regime, the Ch'ien Liang, which was strong enough to survive until the late fourth century. It may be noted in passing that the *Chin-shu* records that states of the Western Regions submitted tribute to the Ch'ien Liang c. 326; and a few years later its ruler Chang Chün 張駿 sent an expedition against Ch'iu-tzu and Shan-shan, which was followed by the general surrender of the states of the Western Regions, and the receipt of hostages or tribute from Shan-shan, Hither Yen-ch'ü, and Khotan.¹⁶

The presentation of tribute from Ta-yüan, that is reported to have taken place in the ninth month of the year *T'ai-shih* 6 泰始 (270),¹⁷ is somewhat surprising in view of the events that were taking place in Liang-chou at that time. Shortly before then Li Hsi 李熹 had suggested the despatch of troops to deal with raiders who were then penetrating Liang-chou, but the central government refused the request on the grounds that the raids were not sufficiently serious. In the event, however, Li Hsi was proved right, as the year 270 saw the occurrence of rebellion in Liang-chou and the defeat of Hu Lieh 胡烈, Regional Inspector of Ch'in-chou, who had been sent to restore order¹⁸ there. Chin-ch'eng, which lay nearer to the heart of China and which was situated athwart the routes that led eventually to Central Asia, suffered raids from northerners in 271, and from rebels of Liang-chou in 274.¹⁹ An incident that occurred in 276 reveals that before then the central government had not been able to control the succession of senior officials in Tun-huang commandery,²⁰ and in 278 the Regional Inspector of Liang-chou was himself defeated in battle at Wu-wei 武威.²¹

One of the causes of insecurity during the decade beginning in 270 can be attributed to the activities of Shu Chi-neng 樹機能, a rebel of Hsien-pi origin. Already in 270 he had inflicted a defeat on the Regional Inspector of Ch'in-chou, and in 275 he staged a full rebellion, shortly however to ask for peace and to submit hostages. For 279 the *Chin-shu* records his subjection of Liang-chou, followed by his defeat and execution, together with the restoration of Liang-chou to peaceful conditions.²²

¹⁶ *CS*, 86.9b, 11a. For the Ch'ien Liang 'dynasty', see Maspero, 78.

¹⁷ *CS*, 3.6b.

¹⁸ *CS*, 3.6a.

¹⁹ *CS*, 3.6b, 8a.

²⁰ *CS*, 3.8b. The event concerned the execution of Ling-hu Hung 令狐宏 by the Regional Inspector of Liang-chou. Ling-hu Hung had assumed control of the commandery on the death of his elder brother Ling-hu Feng 豐, who had himself seized control from Liang Ch'eng 梁澄. This official had been the prefect of Tun-huang *hsien*, and had been placed in charge of the governor's office of Tun-huang commandery at local initiative. This had taken place after the death of Yin Ch'ü 尹璩, who had been the last officially appointed governor of the commandery.

²¹ *CS*, 3.10a.

²² *CS*, 3.6a, 8b, 10b, 11a; *CS*, 57.4b; *Tzu-chih t'ung-chien*, 79 (Peking punctuated edition, p. 2513).

It is against these events that we must consider the records that we have for contacts that were made with Chin by the states of Central Asia. Following Ta-yüan's presentation of tribute in 270, we have no record of any mission until 283, when Shan-shan sent its son or sons to serve at court, and the authorities of Chin responded by granting its king temporary right to the title *Kuei-i hou* 歸義侯 'Noble of the Restoration of Allegiance'.²³ Shan-shan's example was followed two years later by Ch'iu-tzu and Yen-ch'i; and in 287 K'ang-chü sent envoys to court with gifts for the Chin emperor.²⁴

There are thus grounds for at least a tentative hypothesis that the regrouping of provincial units under Ch'in-chou in 269 reflects a measure of retrenchment and consolidation on the part of Chin, in the face of potential and actual insecurity in the north-west; and that the restoration of the earlier administrative arrangement in 282 was a mark of the revival of Chinese influence in that area. For, as has been shown, this measure followed the suppression of a rebellion and was itself followed by the renewal of approaches from the Western States, and the administrative changes that were effected in 295 and proposed in 301-2. It would therefore be expected that, if the adoption of a new title by the king of Shan-shan does signify a new initiative in Chin's foreign relations, this would be more likely to have occurred after 280 than in the decade that started in 260.

Historians may well question the motives of a Chinese advance into Central Asia at this time. In referring to the interest that the governments of Wei or Chin may have had in the Far West, Professor Brough writes (art. cit., 603): 'The initiative may conceivably have come from the central government [of Wei]; but it seems a possibility worth considering that this reoccupation of Central Asian territory was a manoeuvre on the part of the Chin prince to establish a position which would both carry military prestige and also secure control of the trade-routes from the west and food supplies: obviously useful preliminaries to his assumption of the imperial power at the end of A.D. 265'.

In this connexion, attention should perhaps be drawn to the possibility that developments had been taking place in the use of communication routes from China to Central Asia. At the start of the Han interest and ventures, two known routes were in use, running respectively along the southern and the northern edges of the Takla Makan desert. But according to the *Han-shu*²⁵ a new route which had come into existence during the *Yüan-shih* 元始 period (A.D. 1-5) led from the Further kingdom of Chü-shih 車師 to the Yü-men Barrier. This enabled the distance to be cut by as much as half, and had the further advantage of avoiding the White Dragon Mounds. An attempt to bring this route into use was made by the *Wu-chi hsiao-wei* Hsü P'u 徐普, but the diplomatic and military consequences were not altogether advantageous to China. While the Further kingdom of Chü-shih was situated on the northern route, Lou-lan, or Shan-shan, lay across the desert on the southern route. As far as I am aware nothing is known which can determine the location of the new middle route or which can inform us how far it could be utilized. Its existence

²³ *CS*, 3.12b.²⁴ *CS*, 3.13a, 13b.²⁵ *HS*, 96B.20a (32b) et seq.

should, however, be borne in mind in connexion with a passage from the *Wei-lüeh* ²⁶ which notes the existence of three, in place of the former two routes. Huang Wen-pi 黃文弼 has suggested ²⁷ that this should be associated with communications between Lou-lan and China from the early days of the kingdom of Wei (c. 221).

With regard to food supplies, the evidence of the post-Han wooden strips shows the same meticulous attention to the distribution of grain, under conditions of strict supervision and accountancy, as that which is seen in the Han material from Chü-yen, Tun-huang, and Lou-lan. Here there was no question of China receiving supplies of grain from the west; and it is clear that it was the problem of feeding colonial officials and forces from the Chinese end that prompted various schemes for sponsored agriculture, both at Chü-yen itself, and further west at Lun-t'ai 輪臺 and Ch'ü-li 渠犁. Such schemes were never intended to supplement food supplies for China itself.

INSTITUTIONAL PRACTICE AND RECORDS

Both Professor Brough and Professor Enoki call on the evidence provided by the impression of a seal that was attached to three of the Kharoṣṭhī documents found at Niya. The four characters of the seal were originally read by Chavannes ²⁸ as *Shan-shan chün yin* 鄯善郡印, and the inscription was rendered 鄯善□記 by Huang Wen-pi. ²⁹ Both Professor Brough and Professor Enoki read the final character as *wei* 尉; and whereas Professor Brough retains Chavannes's reading *chün*, Professor Enoki ³⁰ regards the third character as uncertain, being possibly either *chün* or *tu* 都.

Despite the different views and the diffidence expressed by no less than four scholars, I would like to suggest that the reading *chün* for the third character is suspect, and that the correct reading of the impression is *Shan-shan tu-wei* 鄯善都尉. There is no evidence to show that *chün*, commanderies, were founded along the edges of the Takla Makan desert during the Han, Wei, or Chin periods; and in view of the pride taken by Chinese governments in founding such units and the detailed lists of *chün* that survive in the standard histories, it would seem somewhat venturesome to assume a reading *chün* without further reasons to show that they had been founded in these remote regions. There is also a further difficulty. The title *chün wei* 郡尉, which existed as part of the establishment of Ch'in 秦 officials, was in due course taken over by the Han government; but from 148 B.C. the title was changed from *wei* to *tu-wei*; and as far as is known, the term *chün wei* does not appear again. ³¹

The reading *tu-wei*, however, by no means necessarily implies the existence

²⁶ *Wei-lüeh chi-pen* 魏略輯本, 22.2b; the central route is described here as running from the Yü-men Barrier by way of Old Lou-lan and other places to Ch'iu-tzu and the Pamir.

²⁷ Huang, 26.

²⁸ Stein, *Serindia*, I, 230.

²⁹ Huang, 24.

³⁰ Enoki, art. cit., 152 f.

³¹ *HS*, 19A.15b (28b, 29a).

of a *chün*, as the expression was used in respect of various types of administration.

1. As has been stated, from 148 B.C. *tu-wei* were established in the *chün* of the Han empire. They bore responsibility for certain military matters and were graded just below the *T'ai-shou* 太守 or Governors. Although the posts of *tu-wei* were generally abolished during the Eastern Han period, they were retained for exceptional cases, i.e. in those commanderies that were situated at the border, where particular attention to military defence was deemed necessary.

2. The title *tu-wei* was also used after a prefix which specified a particular activity or administrative responsibility with which the official was entrusted. Thus the *Kuan tu-wei* 關都尉 were appointed to supervise the passage of traffic through the Barriers; and the *Nung tu-wei* 農都尉 was appointed to control the state-sponsored schemes of agriculture. Furthermore, *shu-kuo tu-wei*, 屬國都尉 or Commandants of the Dependent States were appointed in those areas that lay beyond the direct control of the officials of a *chün* but where some degree of Chinese authority was probably recognized by the non-Chinese population.³²

3. In addition the expression *tu-wei* features in the titles accorded to dignitaries of the states that lay along the northern and southern routes to Central Asia. These titles occur regularly in the factual and statistical information that the *Han-shu* (chapter 96) gives for each state. These lists frequently include *tu-wei* of the Left and the Right, and on some occasions the term is modified by descriptive terms. In at least two cases the *Han-shu* informs us of the existence of *tu-wei* whose title was modified by a place-name; these were the *tu-wei* of Shan-shan and Ching-chüeh 精絕.³³

Not only then is it difficult, if not impossible, to explain the use of the term *chün-wei* for dates after 148 B.C., but it is clear that the term *tu-wei* need not necessarily be associated with a *chün*; and in addition we have independent notice of a dignitary who was termed *Shan-shan tu-wei* during the Han period. Luckily we also possess examples of other seals which were used by officials who were entitled . . . *tu-wei*; and although one cannot be dogmatic about the reading of the seal-impression that is in question, there is at least a case for claiming a resemblance to the forms of the character *tu* in these examples.³⁴

The term *shih-chung* 侍中 features in two connexions in this inquiry. It is seen for certain in the text of a document found at Niya which is mentioned below; and Professor Brough has suggested that it appears in transcription, as the royal title *jitumgha*, from the seventeenth year of King Amgoka. The significance of the term in early Chinese institutions is perhaps of some importance in view of Professor Brough's statement (p. 601) 'There can then be no

³² For the dependent states, see p. 92 above; for *shu-kuo tu-wei*, etc., see *HS*, 19A.11a and 15b (19b and 29a).

³³ *HS*, 96A.4a and 7a (10b and 15b).

³⁴ See *Bokubi* 墨美, No. 24, 1953, (no pagination is given there after the introduction, and the numbers which follow here refer to pages in sequence after p. 16) 17 and 25.

reasonable doubt that the adoption of the title *jitumgha/shih-chung* denoted in reality a submission to China, even if the kings of Shan-shan themselves continued to use it as if it were a title of honour'.

It has been remarked above that the term *shih* 侍 is used in Chinese historical texts to describe the attendance at court by visiting sons or close relatives of the kings of Central Asian states.³⁵ *Shih-chung* itself is included in the list of titles³⁶ which could be conferred on Han officials as a mark of distinction. While the title conferred certain privileges, and generally corresponds to 'Attendant at the Palace', it did not involve specific duties; and there was apparently no fixed complement or upper limit to the number of officials on whom the title could be bestowed. Practice was similar in the Wei and Chin periods, and is duly exemplified in the very difficult inscription on strip N.xv.93. a,b.³⁷

It is on the whole unlikely that the title *shih-chung* would be granted by a Chinese authority to anyone who had not served in personal attendance at the Chinese court. At the same time it remains likely that anyone who had been honoured by the bestowal of the title would be glad to retain it in later years, even after leaving the court of a Chinese emperor. If the identification of *jitumgha* with *shih-chung* is accepted, it must be borne in mind that in all probability the king in question had already seen service in China. It is also perhaps worth noting that in Han practice, on which so many of the Chin institutions were modelled, barbarian leaders who surrendered, and on occasion came to court to show their loyalty, were honoured by the conferment of titles of a different type, e.g. *Kuei-te hou* 歸德侯 or *Kuei-i hou* 歸義侯.³⁸

The Chinese documentary material comprises some 400 strips and fragments found at Lou-lan and some 60 found at Niya, in addition to the pieces found by the Ōtani expedition.³⁹ The inscriptions of an official nature bear a close resemblance to those among the more extensive finds of the earlier, Han, material from the sites of Tun-huang and Chü-yen and from the outposts at Lou-lan.⁴⁰ The business of this correspondence included items which we might expect to find occupying the attention of Chinese military and colonial administrators, e.g. the registration of mail, the issue of supplies, the identification of individuals and their admission at points of control, and a medical prescription, etc. In the post-Han fragments the Chinese authorities which are mentioned

³⁵ e.g. see *HS*, 96A.16a (34a) and *HS*, 96B.8a (10a).

³⁶ *HS*, 19A.13b (24a, b); *HHS* (tr.), 26.4b (4a).

³⁷ The text is given by Professor Brough, art. cit., 600. It is possible that the inscription will bear an interpretation as a list of names and titles of several officials rather than as that of a single one.

³⁸ e.g. *HS*, 96A.2b (7b); *HS*, 96B.8b (11a); *HHS*, 87 (biog. 77).13b and 38b (8a and 23a). See also p. 97 above.

³⁹ There are 120 pieces shown in Conrady. See also Maspero, nos. 169–242 and 243–52; Chavannes, *Documents chinois découverts par Aurel Stein*, Oxford, 1913, nos. 721–939 and 940–50; and Stein, *Ancient Khotan*, I, 537 f., where Chavannes gives the texts, translations, and notes of 52 pieces.

⁴⁰ i.e. the pieces presented in Huang, 179 f. Of the total of 71 strips and fragments assembled there, 7 are also given in *Chü-yen Han-chien chia pien* (see *RHA*, II, 375).

are, with one important exception, those of the commanderies that were established to the east of the Yü-men and Yang Barriers; and the strips can nearly all be explained as parts of records which derive from the normal workings of the civil servants of the commanderies. For the purposes of the present inquiry, the main points of interest lie in (1) the references to Chinese officials other than those of organs situated in commanderies such as Tun-huang, Chiu-ch'üan, etc.; (2) a series of labels found at Niya which are manifestly not drawn from such normal workings; (3) the few references to kings of the states which lay on the Central Asian routes; and (4) the distribution of dates in the material.

(1) The strips which date from the Han period carry at least one reference to the most senior authority of the west, i.e. the *Tu-hu* 都護 or Protector-General.⁴¹ The post-Han documents include at least six references to the *Hsi-yü chang-shih* or the *chang-shih* 西域長史,⁴² and at least one to a Governor-General (*Tu-tu* 都督).⁴³ Of these pieces two call for comment.

(a) Conrady, no. 107. This is a surviving part of a register of mail, and is very similar to other such fragments found elsewhere and dating from the Han period. No. 107 records the despatch of 17 items of mail from the *chang-shih*, all but two of which were addressed to the *fu*, 府, i.e. the office of the *t'ai-shou* or possibly the *tu-wei*, of Tun-huang or Chiu-ch'üan commandery. The despatch of mail is dated precisely, as is usual, to a specified day in the sixth year of *T'ai-shih* 泰始 (270).

(b) Chavannes, no. 751. This characteristically shaped piece bears the address of an official to whom mail was being sent. The main inscription reads: 西域長史 張君坐前.

These two pieces form complementary evidence for assuming that the site of discovery was the locality where the *Hsi-yü chang-shih* had his headquarters. As early as the *Yüan-ch'u* 元初 period (114–20),⁴⁴ Pan Yung 班勇 had suggested that a *Hsi-yü chang-shih* should be despatched with a force of 500 men to form a garrison at Lou-lan, for purposes of defence and communications; but in the event the proposal was not accepted as it stood, and Pan Yung was sent with such a force to garrison Liu-chung 柳中 instead (122–5).⁴⁵ In considering the evidence of these strips, Huang Wen-pi⁴⁶ drew attention to the re-establishment of the post of *Wu-chi hsiao-wei* at Kao-ch'ang 高昌 in the year 222, and its retention by the Chin dynasty; and he suggested that the post of *Hsi-yü chang-shih* may well have existed concurrently at Lou-lan, despite the lack of literary evidence in support. While Maspero⁴⁷ reached very much the

⁴¹ i.e. Huang, no. 1; see also p. 92, n. 5.

⁴² Conrady, no. 107; Chavannes, op. cit., nos. 751, 752, 885; Maspero, no. 209; and Stein, op. cit., Niya N.xv.85 (p. 538).

⁴³ Maspero, no. 213.

⁴⁴ Huang, 25; *HHS*, 47 (biog. 37).21a (12b).

⁴⁵ *HHS*, 47 (biog. 37).23b (14a).

⁴⁶ Huang, 26.

⁴⁷ Maspero, 53; where reference is made to Maspero, no. 209 and Conrady, (paper fragment) 9.3 verso.

same conclusion, Huang Wen-pi goes further, in suggesting an association between the re-establishment of this post and the reopening of communications with Lou-lan from c. 221.

A single reference in the wooden documents to the post of Governor-General (*Tu-tu* 都督) is seen in Maspero, no. 213 (dated 267). Maspero (p. 55) discusses the relationship of this post and the subordinate *chang-shih*, and is careful to distinguish between the post of Protector-General (*Tu-hu* 都護), who had his seat of government deep in the Far West, and that of Governor-General (*Tu-tu* 都督), who bore general responsibility for military command in several *chou* of the empire, and had his headquarters within one of those assigned to his care. In estimating the strength of Chinese activity in the Far West at the time of Conrady, no. 107, i.e. 270, we lack one vital clue, the knowledge whether the *chang-shih* was subordinated to a *Tu-hu* or a *Tu-tu*.

(2) The series of eight labels found at Niya⁴⁸ are documents of an entirely different type from that of the administrative material. Little need be added to Chavannes's interpretation of these pieces as labels which were attached to presents given to members of the local royal family. The pieces bear a note of the donor and the recipient, together with a description of the gift. Sometimes the personal names are recorded. It may perhaps be added that the calligraphic style of these labels is much more that of documents drawn up for the purposes of court procedure or ceremony than that used for the transaction of routine items of business.

(3) Professor Brough rightly points out⁴⁹ that the reading of one inscription so as to include the characters *Shan-shan wang* 鄯善王 can only be taken on trust. The piece in question (N.xv.345; *Ancient Khotan*, p. 538, plate cxiv) is not a fragment of a document, but is one of the blocks cut to accommodate sealing strings; it would thus be expected to bear the name of the addressee. In these circumstances it is unlikely that a fourth character of the inscription would have been *chao* 詔, as was tentatively suggested by Chavannes.⁵⁰

A further reference to one of the local kings is seen in Niya document N.xv.73, which reads: 于寘王寫下詔書到奉. Chavannes (*Ancient Khotan*, I, 538) renders this: 'Le roi de Yu-t'ien a écrit et rendu (un edit); cet édit est arrivé et a été reçu . . . '.

(4) Maspero has pointed out⁵¹ that the dates mentioned in the wooden material fall between the periods 263 and 270, and 312 and 330. Obviously, unduly precise conclusions may not be drawn from this observation. It does, however, raise the question of the circumstances in which the strips were written.

It is clear from the content of the inscriptions that the Chinese officials were in close enough contact with the centre to keep up to date with the changes of *nien-hao* of the Chin dynasty. The sudden appearance of documentary material

⁴⁸ Chavannes, op. cit., nos. 940-7.

⁵⁰ In *Ancient Khotan*, I, 538.

⁴⁹ art. cit., p. 590, n. 25.

⁵¹ See n. 51, p. 103.

from 263 (or, if we follow Huang, 252)⁵¹ need be due to no more than the accidental fall of the archaeologist's spade and the different locations of rubbish heaps in the third century. If so, we must bear in mind the possibility that out-posts of Chinese officials survived continuously in the Far West, in greater or smaller degree and connected more or less intimately with the central government. Alternatively it may be held that the sudden appearance of the dated strips is due to a reassertion of Chinese effort, accompanied by the re-establishment of official posts after an interval. There is apparently no evidence of administrative expansion which would support this view. Similarly, the absence of dates between 271 and 311 may also be due to accident; if it is not to be so ascribed, it could conceivably be explained, in part, as the outcome of the Chinese administrative and military weakness in the north-west that occurred from *c.* 270, as is discussed above.

⁵¹ Maspero, 52. Huang, 26, suggests that the date 喜平四年, which is said to appear in one inscription, is a corruption for 嘉平四年, *i.e.* 252. However, as the same set of fragments also refer to a date in *T'ai-shih* 2, *i.e.* 266, they cannot be dated before that year. See Conrady, (paper) 16.1, 16.2, where, however, the crucial character does not appear on the facsimile.