Viewing the Situation of 7th Century Afghanistan from Great Tang Records on the Western Regions

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Abstract: Afghanistan has a long history of communication with China, which is recorded in many ancient Chinese texts. Among these texts, *Great Tang Records on the Western Regions* gives an especially detailed account of the ancient Afghanistan. Using *Great Tang Records on the Western Regions* as the primary source, this paper explores the geography, nationality, politics, economy, culture, and religion of the 7th century Afghanistan, and compares with those of modern day Afghanistan, wishing to provide an overview of Afghanistan at a particular stage in its history and find the origin of its modern day issues.

Key words: Afghanistan; 7th century; *Great Tang Records on the Western Regions*

从《大唐西域记》看七世纪阿富汗地区概况

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提　要：阿富汗与中国的交往历史悠久，在中国很多古籍中有所记载。其中，《大唐西域记》对古阿富汗地区的记述尤为 翔实。本文通过《大唐西域记》全面考察七世纪阿富汗地区的国家地理、民族、政治、经济、文化、宗教等方面概况，简要 分析历史形成原因，并与当今阿富汗加以比较，希望能一定程度上还原阿富汗在特定历史阶段的全貌，并对当今阿富汗问题 的研究起到某种探源作用。

关键词：阿富汗；七世纪；《大唐西域记》

Preface

Afghanistan is a neighboring state of China, and the exchanges between China and Afghanistan enjoy a long history. As early as more than 2,000 years ago in the Han Dynasty, Zhang Qian twice arrived in ancient Afghanistan, thus opening the way from China to Central Asia, Western Asia and Mediterranean civilizations through Afghanistan. Xuanzang traveled westward to India to learn from the scriptures in the Tang Dynasty. He also twice passed through the ancient Afghanistan area. In his *Great Tang Records on the Western Regions*, he recorded in detail the natural and social outline of the ancient Afghanistan area at that time. Because of the large number

of small states and the low degree of civilization in Central Asia in the seventh century, there is a great lack of written historical data. There is no doubt that the *Great Tang Records on the Western Regions* has become a unique and precious material for the study of the history of Afghanistan in the seventh century. However, from the Chinese and foreign academic literature databases such as CNKI and JSTOR, it is found that most of the historical research documents based on this book pay attention to the historical situation of ancient India and Xinjiang, and a few papers (Gu Xiaoyong et al., 2007; Wang Ling, 2009; Wang Heqin and Li Lian, 2015) are involved in some states in ancient Afghanistan, but the paper on the special study of ancient Afghanistan has not yet been found. In view of the fact that the historical value of the *Great Tang Records on the Western Regions* is recognized by academic circles at home and abroad, this paper intends to investigate the historical situation of Afghanistan in the seventh century through the *Great Tang Records on the Western Regions*, involving national geography, nationality, politics, economy, culture, religion and so on. It basically presents what is described in the book. From the point of view of practical value, as an important country along the "Belt and Road Initiative" route, the study of Afghanistan's historical outline during the period of the Ancient Silk Road and its comparison with today will help us to have a more thorough understanding of the historical development of Afghanistan. It is of great significance to trace the origin of the study of today's Afghanistan issue.

In the translation notes of the *Great Tang Records on the Western Regions*, Dong Zhiqiao (2012) and Ji Xianlin (2000) are relatively authoritative. Dong Zhiqiao (2012) carries on the comprehensive translation and annotation to the original text, indicating the exact position of each state, which provides a solid research foundation for this paper. The original texts quoted in this paper, if not explained, are cited from the book. Ji Xianlin et al (2000) made a historical analysis of some of the original texts of the *Records of Western World in Great Tang Dynasty*. In the preface, he focuses on discussing and comparing the social, political and religious conditions between the Tang Dynasty and India.

1. An overview of national geography of Afghanistan in the seventh century

Among the states mentioned in the *Great Tang Records on the Western Regions*, those located in ancient Afghanistan generally include the following states (see table below), a total of 33 states.

Table 33 states in Afghanistan in the seventh century

No.	Ancient name	Today's location		No.	Ancient name	Today's location
1	The State of Tirmidh	Not far from the mouth of the Amu Darya from the Surkhan River		18	The State of Kapisa	62 km north of Kabul

2	The State of Sahaniyan	Upper reaches of Surkhan River		19	The State of Jaguḍa	155 km south of Kabul
3	The State of Kharun	Near Dushanbe today		20	The State of Vṛjiṣṭhana	155 km south of Kabul
4	The State of Shuman	Near Dushanbe today		21	The State of Andarab	West of Khawak
5	The State of Kuvayana	East of Tirmidh, lower reaches of Kafirnihan river		22	The State of Khost	Upper reaches of the Amu Darya in northeastern Afghanistan
6	The State of Wakhsh	10 kilometers west of Kurgan–Tübe		23	The State of Huoh	Near Kunduz today
7	The State of Khuttalan	125 kilometers southeast of Dushanbe today		24	The State of Mungan	
8	The State of Komidai	Sulkhob River Basin in the upper reaches of the Wakesh River		25	The State of Alini	Near Hazrät–Imam
9	The State of Baghlan	About 60 kilometers southwest of Kunduz		26	The State of Rahu	Located at Rawam, north of the Oxus River
10	The State of Hrum–Simin gan	Haibak in Khulum River Basin		27	The State of Krisma	Between Fayzabad and Talaqan
11	The State of Khulm	Northern suburbs of Tash–Kurghan		28	The State of Parghar	Located at the point where Parghar flows into the Amu Darya
12	The State of Baktra	23 km west of Mazar–i–Sharīf		29	The State of Himatala	
13	The State of Zumathan	At the foot of the Hindu Kush mountains		30	The State of Badakshan	Today's Badaha place
14	The State of Guzganan	Between Merv and Baktra		31	The State of Invakan	Located in the Kokcha River Basin

15	The State of Talaqan	65 km east of Kunduz		32	The State of Kuraṇa	Kuran in Muslim Geographic Literature
16	The State of Kacik	Dallahas		33	The State of Dharmasthiti	South of Wakhan, about 90 kilometers north of Chitral
17	The State of Bamīyana	About 150 miles west of Kabul, Bamyan City				

Among them, 1 to 18 states were all the states through which Xuanzang traveled westward to learn his sutras, and 19 to 33 states were the states through which Xuanzang returned to the China. These states vary in size, ranging from a few thousand miles to hundreds of miles. 1–16 states, 21–33 states all belong to the ancient Tokharoi[also known as Tukhara]. The old territory of Tokharoi was more than a thousand miles from north to south and more than three thousand miles from east to west. The east side of it was mountain, the west side was Parsa, the south side was snowy mountains, the north side was iron gate...and it was divided into 27 states. " Divided into 27 states. " However, according to the *Great Tang Records on the Western Regions*, the original place of Tokharoi was divided into "more than 27 small states", which is accrued to 29 states (Ji Xianlin et al., 2000).

From the point of view of climate, the climate type of most states in Tokharoi was similar to that of subtropical monsoon climate. "The climate was mild and there were numerous epidemics. At the end of winter and the beginning of spring, long-continued heavy rain came one after another." In the Snowy Mountains (today's Hindu Kush Mountains), the state of Bamīyana and the State of Vṛjiṣṭhana belong to the alpine climate of the plateau. "The valley is deep and the peak rock is dangerous. The successive wind and snow make the summer cold, and the valley is covered with snow, so it is difficult to find a path through." In addition, the state of Kacik, the state of Kapisa, the state of Jaguḍa , the state of Andarab, the state of Khost, the state of Himatala to the state of Dharmasthiti all belong to the temperate continental climate. "The climate was cold...suitable for growing crops, flowers and fruits." Generally speaking, the climate is uneven, and the climate types roughly include temperate continental climate, subtropical monsoon climate, plateau alpine climate and so on.

2.An overview of ethnic groups of Afghanistan in the seventh century

According to the *Great Tang Records on the Western Regions*, the population of Afghanistan in

the seventh century generally belonged to the Turkic kind, or mainly Turkic kind. “Although the criteria for land division in Tokharoi were not clear,but generally speaking, it belongs to Turkic.” The state of Kapisa and the state of Dharmasthiti were more special. The king of Kapisa was a Sughd, and people of and the state of Dharmasthiti “had blue eyes, which were different from those of other states.” In the *Great Tang Records on the Western Regions*, it is mentioned many times that the people of various states in this area have a "disgraceful appearance", which is an aesthetic issue and there is no certain standard for it.

The *Great Tang Records on the Western Regions* does not describe the ethnic groups in ancient Afghanistan too much. As a matter of fact, the ethnic composition at that time was complicated. The earliest Afghans originated in ancient Persia and were occupied by the Persian Empire and the Alexander Empire. After the fall of the Alexander Empire, Afghanistan belonged to the Seleucus Kingdom. Around 250 BC, the Kingdom of Greece–Baktria in Afghanistan became independent from the ancient kingdom of Seleucus, known as "Balkh" and "Tokharoi" in ancient Chinese books. In the *Great Tang Records on the Western Regions*, "the old place of Tokharoi" refers to this area. Since then, Afghanistan was occupied by Darouzhi around 140 BC and has since become part of Kushan empire. After the 3rd century, the Kushan Empire was divided into many small states, and in the first half of the 5th century, these small states were destroyed by Ephta [that is, the White Huns, nomadic people, originated in the Altai Mountains of Xinjiang.]. Around 567, Sassanid Empire and the West Turkic jointly destroyed the area, which was occupied by the Western Turkic. (Liu Xiaohu, 2017) When Xuanzang arrived in Afghanistan, the area belonged to the West Turkic, so it is said that "generally speaking, it belongs to Turkic”.

According to Shaista Wahab et al. (2016), Today's Afghanistan consists mainly of four major ethnic groups: Pashtun (about 42 per cent of the Afghan population), Tajikistan (about 27 per cent), Hazara (about 9 per cent) and Uzbekistan (about 9 per cent). According to Wang Xin (2006), in more than 700 years from the demise of Balkh to the early Tang Dynasty, the land of northeastern Afghanistan, known as the land of the Tokharoi, was conquered by Darouzhi, Ephta, Persia and Turkic. As a result, this area has formed a situation of numerous nationalities and wracked by wars in history. The agricultural and nomadic nationalities merged with each other and formed the predecessor of the Pashtun. Subsequently, the establishment of the Balkh brought about the Sakas and other nationalities, and formed the predecessor of the Tajik. The embryonic form of the two nationalities was formed when Xuanzang arrived, but there was no clear distinction and naming.

The Hazaras, descendants of the ancient Afghan soldiers stationed in the Mongolia Empire, did not appear in the seventh century. The Uzbekistan ethnic group, formed by the assimilation of East Iranians settled in Central Asia by invading Turkic people, entered Afghanistan in large numbers after the 18th century as a result of hiding from tsar Russia.

To sum up, the ethnic groups in Afghanistan in the seventh century had already taken shape, and the agricultural nationalities and invading nomads from ancient Persia and ancient India

have experienced long-term integration, and their ethnic characteristics are similar to those in Afghanistan today. However, because the ancient Afghanistan at that time had not experienced the invasion of the Mongolia Empire and the influence of tsar Russia and other countries, and there was no clear distinction between the various ethnic groups, it did not fully have the ethnic structure of Afghanistan today. The fact that the Hazaras have not yet formed and the Uzbeks have not yet arrived is a typical example.

3. An overview of the politics of Afghanistan in the seventh century

In the seventh century, Afghanistan was full of small states and politically unstable. The old land of Tokharoi has been divided into 27 states. Because of the extinction of the royal family for several hundred years, the chiefs began to compete, and they were all very good at the way of being monarch, so according to the terrain, they occupied different places and divided them into 27 states. [the actual number of states was more than 27, which has been discussed in the third chapter of this paper.] " All states followed the monarch hereditary system, except that the monarch of Kapisa was a Sughd, all the other monarchs were Turkic. In the *Great Tang Records on the Western Regions*, it is described in detail that the monarchical s were the State of Kapisa, the State of Jaguḍa, the State of Vṛjiṣṭhana, the State of Badakshan , the State of Invakan, and the State of Kuraṇa. The administrative level and characteristics of monarchs varied greatly from state to state. The King of Kapisa was wise and strong in nature, was seen as a threat to his neighbors, and unified more than a dozen states. He loved his people and hold respect the three treasures. " The State of Jaguḍa was with “a king of integrity who inherited the tradition, brought blessing to his people and was eager to learn”, "the king of Vṛjiṣṭhana" firmly believed in the three treasures and learned to obey the virtue". In the State of Badaksh ā n " the king was pure in nature and firmly believed in the three treasures ". In the State of Invakan, "the king was cruel and couldn’t tell good and evil". In the State of Kuraṇa, "the king was pure in nature and revered the three treasures".

It can be seen that the political situation of the above-mentioned states varies greatly from place to place. Xuanzang did not mention the political situation in other states, but through a summary of the state's original place, it is clear that the internal affairs of Afghanistan in the seventh century were unstable, indicating by local separatist regimes and interactive disputes. Peng Shuzhi and Huang Yangwen (2009) explained this: at the end of the Kushan Empire, ancient Afghanistan began to gradually transit from slavery to feudal society. From the 4th to the 6th century, with the disintegration of the Kushan Empire, the rule of the Ephta, and the occupation of Turkic and Sassanid Persians, many small opposing states appeared on the basis of feudal manor territory. The situation of such small states is similar to that of Afghanistan in recent years, which has been divided into many small states or armed factions, resulting in internal unrest.

In the sixth and seventh centuries, the external political environment in Afghanistan was also

unstable and coveted by many states and ethnic groups. Because it was located between several great powers, it became the object of struggle between Sassanid Persians, the Ephta and the West Turkic. Ephta was destroyed in 567 AD, Tokharoi [Tokharoi is not strictly the name of Afghanistan, located in the northern part of present–day Afghanistan, west of the Pamir Plateau and south of the Amu Darya.] was divided into Sassanid Persians. A year later, the West Turkic took over the area. In 627, the West Turkic established a Turkic dynasty in Tokharoi. (Liu Xiaohu, 2017) It can be seen that the external situation of ancient Afghanistan was chaotic and controversial at that time, which is similar to the external situation in Afghanistan today. Modern Afghanistan was first invaded by the Soviet Union, and then Russia, India, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Turkey, Iran, Pakistan and other neighboring countries proceed from their respective interests. The support or instigation of armed factions in Afghanistan has exacerbated the complexity and sensitivity of the surrounding situation.

4.An overview of the economy of Afghanistan in the seventh century

In the seventh century, the economy of Afghanistan was dominated by agriculture, supplemented by animal husbandry. Commerce was prosperous in a few states, handicrafts were generally weak, and most states already used currency. The mode of production and the type of currency varied from state to state.

Because of the wide distribution of subtropical climate and temperate continental climate in Afghanistan in the seventh century, grain, wheat, flowers and fruits were widely planted. In the *Great Tang Records on the Western Regions*, the agricultural production from the the State of Baktra, the State of Kacik to the State of Jaguḍa, the State of Andarab to the State of Huoh, the State of Himatala to the State of Dharmasthiti and so on was described in detail. Among them, the State of Baktra, the State of Kapisa, the State of Jaguḍa, the State of Andarab, the State of Khost, the State of Huoh, the State of Himatala, the State of Badakshan, the State of Invakan, the State of Kuraṇa were "with abundant crops, fruits and flowers”, suitable for planting beans, wheat and other crops as well as all kinds of fruits. The State of Kacik, the State of Bamīyana, the State of Dharmasthiti were “with less flowers and fruits, more beans and wheat." In addition, the State of Invakan was rich in apple, walnut and other fruits, and the State of Kapisa and State of Jaguḍa were rich in tulips. In the Great Tang Records on the Western Regions, "wheat" refers to spring wheat, "Sumai" refers to winter wheat, "Shu" refers to beans, and "nai" refers to apples (Gu Xiaoyong et al., 2007). In the seventh century, Afghanistan had a suitable climate and rich grassland, which was suitable for the development of animal husbandry. The State of Kapisa and the State of Dharmasthiti "produce many good horses, although the horses are small but good at running and wading." The mining industry was not yet developed, but it was rich in mineral resources. The State of Kuraṇa "has lots of gold in the mountains and rocks", indicating that there were already

exploitable gold mines in Afghanistan at that time. As for handicrafts, the book did not explicitly mention, but at that time, most people "wore fur clothing", it can be seen that the manual textile industry was not yet developed. There is no direct description of commerce in the book, but according to the "exotic goods gathered in Kapisa", it can be inferred that the state has relatively developed commerce and businessmen commute to and from other states. At that time, most states have applied the use of currency, but with different patterns. For example, in ancient Tokharoi, the appearance of money like silver, gold and other currencies in circulation was different from that of other states." The currency patterns of other states were probably the same as those of Tokharoi , such as the currency used by the the state of Bamīyana. The only exception was Kapisa, with certain shapes of gold, silver and copper coins that were different from that of other states.

From the above, it is clear that the economy of Afghanistan in the seventh century relied mainly on agricultural cultivation, agriculture was relatively developed, with legumes and wheat as main crops. Some areas were rich in fruit and flowers; Animal husbandry and commerce flourished in some states, with clear accounts of the mining industry only in Kuran and developed trade in Kapisa, and manual manufacturing was generally weak. All states used currency at that time. The currency used by them were roughly the same with the exception of Kapisa. On the whole, the economic situation at that time was relatively consistent, with no distinct diversity.

Most of Afghanistan has a continental climate, so it is suitable for the production of wheat crops and fruits such as grapes and apples, a feature that has remained largely unchanged for thousands of years. Due to the turbulent situation and low industrial level in modern Afghanistan, the traditional agricultural production mode is basically used, which leads to the same agricultural characteristics in Afghanistan as in the seventh century. Only because of years of war and serious economic backwardness, Afghanistan has increased drug cultivation in recent years. The development of animal husbandry is similar to agriculture, which is greatly affected by the geographical environment, and today's animal husbandry in Afghanistan has not changed much compared with the seventh century, and modern pasture has not yet been produced. Zhang Jijun and Zhu Xiaoyan (2012) also mentioned that Afghans have always been engaged in animal husbandry or agriculture, looking for ways to avoid handicrafts and commerce, resulting in the prevalence of agriculture and animal husbandry and the weakness of industry and commerce in Afghanistan since ancient times. In addition, Afghanistan is rich in mineral resources and precious stone resources, but due to the low level of industry, Afghanistan has not exploited mineral resources on a large scale in recent years. However, the exploitation of gemstone resources has a long history, which should have been carried out in the seventh century, but Xuanzang did not write about it. According to Shaista Wahab et al. (2006), gems and jade, which have been mined for thousands of years, still provide economic income for Afghanistan.

5. An overview of the culture of Afghanistan in the seventh century

The *Great Tang Records on the Western Regions* describes the folkways, spoken and written languages and costumes of ancient Afghanistan, from which we can get a general view of the culture at that time.

According to the book, the customs of most states in Afghanistan in the seventh century were vulgar, some of which were more violent and some were more austere. For example, the people of ancient Tokharoi "were timid in nature and disgraceful in appearance. They have a rough knowledge of faith and not very fraudulent." Most of the people in other states were "rough and violent in human nature and fierce in customs." Among them, the state of Kapisa was "disdainful in words and disorderly in marriage," and the state of Jaguḍa and the state of Vṛjiṣṭhana were "more talkative and less realistic." the state of Andarab to the state of Dharmasthiti were with"vulgar lawlessness". Generally speaking, Xuanzang had a low evaluation of the folk customs of Afghanistan in the seventh century, which should be due to the contrast between the mature etiquette system of the Tang Dynasty and the relatively primitive etiquette norms of Afghanistan. In the seventh century, Chinese civilization has been quite complete, and Afghanistan does not have as long a history as China, and has been chaotic for a long time, so the degree of civilization is naturally far inferior to that of China. As a result, in Xuanzang's eyes, Afghan residents were vulgar and uncourteous.

On the other hand, the language and clothing and other living habits were basically the same in various states. The Tokharoi language of ancient Afghanistan was not spread in the Tocharian, of Xinjiang, but the language recorded in the Greek alphabet since the Balkh, "words came from 25 languages, turn to each other, and use them as a preparation. The book was read horizontally, from left to right, and there were many written records." The rest of the states were all "written in the same way as the Tokharoi". The only exception was the state of Jaguḍa, "with words different from those of other states." Ji Xianlin et al. (2000) explained that "there had been many ethnic differences here for a long time, so they formed a language system that was different from other states." Due to the conquest of Alexander the Great and the long–term occupation of the Kingdom of Greece–Baktria, the ancient Afghanistan was greatly influenced by Greek culture, and the later Kushan Empiredeveloped the Indian–Greek culture to the extreme. The Greek language was more mature and easy to use. At that time, the local language was integrated, and it was spread and used after simple modification. According to Shaista Wahab et al. (2016), the main languages in Afghanistan today are Afghan Persian [Dari] (50%), Pashtun (35%), Turkic (11%), and other minor languages (4%). And most people speak multiple languages. The above–mentioned languages, which are commonly used in Afghanistan today, are formed after the absorption and integration of Eastern and Western languages. Among them, Afghan Persian mainly comes from the language of ancient Persia. The Pashtun language is greatly influenced by the Indian

language, and it also absorbs many Persian and Arabic loanwords, but still retains many of the characteristics of the ancient Iranian language. [some of the above information comes from Baidu encyclopedia.]. Turkic comes from the Turkic language; with the exception of Turkic, almost all other languages come from the Iranian branch of the Indo–European language family. The reason why the Greek language is not used in Afghanistan today is mainly due to the aggression and occupation experienced by later generations. After the decline of the Kushan Empire, the Sassanid Empire , the Huns and the Turkic invaded Afghanistan one after another, causing great damage to the Indian–Greek culture of Afghanistan. After this destruction, Buddhism and Gandharan school were declining in Afghanistan, and Greek culture has also been dealt a blow. But what really wiped out Greek in Afghanistan was the occupation of the Muslim empire and the invasion of the Mongols. Both the Muslim Samanid Dynasty and Ghaznavid Dynasty made the official language of Afghanistan Persian, thus greatly reducing the influence of Greek. The invasion of the Mongolia Empire brought extensive and systematic damage to Afghanistan. After this, Greek cultural relics disappeared, and Greek characters have never been popular here since.

In terms of clothing, people in Tokharoi in general "wore cotton clothes, less coarse wool clothes." It can be seen that at that time, the northern part of Afghanistan used more cloth and less fur clothing (Wang Ling, 2009). On the other hand, the State of B ā m ī y ā na, the State of Kapisa, the State of Huoh, the State of Himatala,the State of Badaksh ā n , the State of Kuraṇa, and the State of Dharmasthiti "wore more fur clothes". It can be seen that fur clothing was widely used in these states (Wang Ling, 2009). In addition, there was a more special custom in the the State of Himatala , "women wore wooden horns on their heads". Liu Xiaohu (2012) mentioned: "the Northern History: Biography of the Western Region records one side of the primitive legacy of the Ephta: “All the brothers share one wife. If the husband has no brothers, the wife wears a horn hat. If there are brothers, according to the number of brothers, the number horn hat would be increased,” It can be inferred that the State of Himatala has retained the customs of the Ephta. The above dress habits were mainly related to the local climate. Because most of the region has a continental climate and produces cotton, it was suitable for local people to wear cotton clothes. Some areas boasted high altitude, bad climate, and developed animal husbandry, so it was suitable to wear fur clothing. Due to the underdevelopment of handicrafts, their daily clothing was mainly simple and practical, lack of exquisite decoration.

6.An overview of the religion in Afghanistan in the seventh century

Buddhism was more common in Afghanistan in the seventh century. Among the 33 states, 17 states clearly recorded their belief in Buddhism. The states with large Buddhist beliefs were the State of Baktra , Thestate of Bamīyana, the State of Kapisa, and the State of Jaguḍa. Among them, The State of Jaguḍa had "hundreds of temples and more than 10,000 monks", which can be listed as the

largest. The State of Bamīyana, the State of Kapisa, the State of Jaguḍa and the State of Andarab studied Mahayana Buddhism, while the rest of the states studied Hinayana Buddhism and people in the State of Huoh "learn both Mahayana Buddhism and Hinayana Buddhism." In the State of Kapisa, in addition to practicing Mahayana Buddhism, there are also "dozens of other kinds of temples, with more than a thousand people of heterodoxy"[According to Ji Xianlin et al. (2000), "heterodoxy" is Jainism.]. Generally speaking, most of the Afghan states in the seventh century believed in Buddhism, including half of Mahayana Buddhism and half of Hinayana Buddhism in some states, as well as the mixed Buddhism in some states, and a small number of states believed in other religions.

However, according to the book, Buddhism in most states was very small at that time, with only a few temples and only a hundred monks, indicating that Buddhism had declined in Afghanistan at this time. Buddhism was introduced into ancient Afghanistan from the Maurya Empire during the Ashoka period (273–232 BC) and merged with the culture of the local Greek–Bucktrian Kingdom to form Indo–Greek culture, or Gandharan school. After that, the Kushan Empire carried forward the Gandharan school and developed and spread Mahayana Buddhism. The famous Bamiyan Giant Buddha is the representative work of it, and Buddhism also entered China because of the great spread of the Kushan Empire. Buddhism declined after the decline of the Kushan Empire in the 3rd century AD. Therefore, by the time Xuan Zang entered Afghanistan, Buddhism was not as powerful as it used to be.

We believe that the decline of Buddhism in Afghanistan is mainly due to the instability of the political situation and the collision of multiculturalism. The invasion of Ephta greatly exacerbated the decline of Buddhism. Peng Shuzhi and Huang Yangwen (2009) pointed out that the Ephta belief in Zoroastrianism and opposition to Buddhism was a fatal threat to the Buddhist culture that prevailed in most parts of Afghanistan. The great destruction caused by Ephta to Buddhism was also recorded in the *Great Tang Records on the Western Regions* : "by taking advantage of their victory, they crusaded against Gandh ā laya to the west, destroyed Stupa and 1600 temples. "Sassanian Persian and Turkic, after the Ephta, were not interested in Buddhism, and the subsequent Muslim conquest dealt a devastating blow to Buddhism in Afghanistan. Arab troops entered Afghanistan in the mid–seventh century, and although it took more than 150 years to conquer Afghanistan, Islam has grown since it entered Afghanistan, until it became the main religious force in Afghanistan. Today, 99 per cent of Afghanistan's population is Muslim, with less than 1 per cent of Hinduism, Sikhism and Judaism (Shaista Wahab et al., 2016), and Buddhism almost disappeared. It can be said that on the one hand, the invasion of the above–mentioned states brought years of war and political chaos, resulting in the great destruction of Buddhist temples and works of art, and there was no room for Buddhism to develop. On the other hand, it also brought Zoroastrianism, Islam and other religions and cultures, which had a great impact on Buddhism.

As for the mixed Mahayana Buddhism and Hinayana Buddhism in Afghanistan in the seventh

century, it is probably because Afghanistan is located in the hub of Central Asia, where cultures converge. According to Wang Heqin and Li Lian (2015), Hinayana Buddhism was first introduced into the Western region in the first century, and then Mahayana Buddhism was introduced from India. It can be seen that at that time, the phenomenon of mixed Mahayana Buddhism and Hinayana Buddhism mainly originated from the exchange and collision of surrounding cultures.

Conclusion

Afghanistan is located in a strategic location, which has always been the focus of the world, and the research on Afghanistan is also a hot spot. However, the research on ancient Afghanistan is relatively lacking, mainly because of the lack of historical records. The Great Tang Records on the Western Regions is a documentary work commissioned by Li Shimin, the emperor of the Tang Dynasty after Xuanzang traveled westward to India in the Tang Dynasty. It is of great value in historical research and has records of many aspects in ancient Afghanistan. Through the *Great Tang Records on the Western Regions*, this paper focuses on 33 states in ancient Afghanistan and presents a comprehensive overview of the geography, nationality, politics, economy, culture and religion of the region in the seventh century. It also makes a brief analysis of the reasons for its historical formation and the relationship between ancient and modern Afghanistan, hoping to reflect the internal context of the historical development of Afghanistan to a certain extent. Because of the limited and scattered contents of the book, the presentation of Afghanistan in the seventh century is rather extensive and lack of systematicness. In addition, due to space limitation, the relationship between ancient and modern Afghanistan has only been pointed out, and has not been carried out in depth. It is hoped that the follow-up study will carry out a special discussion on this issue.

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