

DID BUDDHISTS ACTUALLY DISCOVER AMERICA?

PART I

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Archaeological evidence presently at our disposal seems to make one thing certain; ancient Chinese mariners, if not Buddhist missionaries, discovered America long before Columbus. While such evidence has presented itself in recent years by the discovery of stone anchors off the California coast, anchors determined to be of Chinese origin--and the ancient Chinese did indeed use stone anchors, according to Joseph Needham and other experts on things Chinese--certain European sinologists of the eighteenth century were the first to suggest that the Chinese were in America in the remote past.

Paper published by these scholars stimulated many subsequent speculations about Buddhist influences on pre-Columbian America, influences resulting from a voyage undertaken by five monks who originally came from that country now known as Afghanistan to a vast continent called Fusang. The record of this exploit was written in the "*Chu I Chuan*" (Record of the Barbarians) of the *Liang Shu* (History of the Liang Dynasty), Liang being a southern Chinese kingdom which succeeded the Chi Dynasty in 502 CE.

Hui Shen, a monk from Chi-Pin (Cophene to the ancients and Kabul to moderns), in the first year of the Chi Dynasty (c. 499 CE), was the first to have told the story of Fusang. He reported that in 458 CE (Western time reckoning), when the Liu Sung Dynasty (420-479 CE) was in power, five monks journeyed to the continent of Fusang, a land described as being more than 20,000 *li* (about 11,500 kms.) east of China. To the emperor Wu Ti of the new Liang Dynasty, the dynasty that was in power when the monks returned to China, Hui Shen presented gifts of curious articles brought from Fusang. Among these was a fabric resembling silk, but the threads of which could support a great weight without breaking, a fabric evidently made from the fiber of the Mexican agave. He also presented a mirror one foot in diameter, possessing "wonderful" properties and resembling those in use in Mexico and other American localities at that time. He also reported that the pi-k'iu--he seemd not to have indicated whether he was one of the five or whether there were five besides himself--propagated the Dharma, taught the aborigines the ways of peace, improved their manners and customs, and even ordained a few bhikshus.

-to be continued-

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