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THE CHINESE INSCRIPTION OF THE "DA WEI" ENVOY  
OF THE "SACRED ROCK OF HUNZA"

The northern districts of Pakistan lie south of the Pamirs, bounded by the south-western region of Xinjiang Province in China. The Indus and Gilgit Rivers meet near the boundary zone of the Karakorum mountains and the Himalayas. Here the snow peaks tower high into the sky and the sparkling glaciers dazzle the eyes. Deep canyons provide the only passageways for people to get to and fro. Due to rushing currents and precipitous cliffs, indigenous bridges (maybe corresponding to the so-called "Suspended Crossings" in Chinese traditions) were in common use in the upper reaches of the Indus.

During the period between the Han and Tang dynasties, however, when the trade along the "Silk Road" prospered, the area was the hub of an important net of routes from China to Western and Southern Asia through which envoys, merchants, monks and the like passed back and forth in an endless stream, leaving there many relics and inscriptions. After the middle period of the Tang dynasty (from the 8<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> century) however, the route declined in importance. Since then, the area was effectively cut off from the outside world for over a thousand years. As a result, its historical remains were largely unknown until recently. This isolated area did not become easily accessible to the outside world until the seventies of the present century, when an 800 kilometre road, the Karakorum Highway, was completed by Pakistan in cooperation with China. This highway starts from Tashkurgan in Xinjiang, crosses over the Khunjerab pass at an elevation of more than 4.600 metres and extends down south along the Hunza, the Gilgit and the Indus rivers until it reaches