

**A Selection of Letters from Chinese Officials in Xinjiang to Aurel Stein and Paul  
Pelliot, 1908–25**

Translated by Justin M. Jacobs

**1) Zhu Ruichi, Pishan, to Aurel Stein, 1908**

I, Zhu Ruichi, an official in charge of administering Pishan [Guma] County in the Shache [Yarkand] Prefecture of Xinjiang within the Great Qing Empire, respectfully submit this letter to His Excellency Stein (*Si daren*), excavator of ancient relics (*kaocha guji*) and Great Superintendent for Education in India in the Great British Empire.

I have received and read through the letter Your Grace has sent me. When your exalted presence last departed from Yutian [Keriya], it was by means of a small path that took you past the Su-gai-ti border post. While on the road, you encountered snowcapped mountain peaks and a bitter cold air that pierced through to the bone and rendered all clothing immaterial. When I heard that your hands and feet had become chapped and frostbitten, I was immediately gripped with grief, and a deep sorrow took hold of my heart. Upon further reflection, however, my thoughts turned to admiration. What I mourn is the thought of the hardships you must endure while scaling mountains and fording bodies of water, and of the difficult straits in which you continually place yourself. What I admire, however, is your stern fortitude and valiant resolve.

Everywhere you set your foot, dear Sir, becomes famous, from the luster you confer on the sands of the Gobi to the distinction you confer on the peaks of the Kunlun.

Upon my mind is engraved the fervent desire to see you return to your country in an ethereal carriage pulled by piebald horses, to receive your just due in honors and recognition. Nothing would be more pleasing than to learn of your continued rise through the ranks. Such a thing truly would be cause for congratulations. My attendants were remiss in attending to your needs, and they are deeply appreciative for the bountiful rewards [they received]. Each one of them expresses the most sincere gratitude.

It is my privilege to submit this reply, and I respectfully pray for your honorable return, which will be a great cause for rejoicing. I hope for your promotion, and humbly send my distant regards.

The sixth day of the tenth month in the thirty-fourth year of Guangxu of the Great Qing [October 30, 1908]

**2) Xie Weixing, Khotan, to Aurel Stein, August 2, 1908**

I, Xie, an official in the Independent Department of Khotan, subordinate to Gansu and Xinjiang of the Great Qing, send my repeated regards in this letter to Stein, the excavator of ancient artifacts and Great Superintendent of British Education.

My respected Sir, ever since your Excellency arrived in Khotan, I have been in continual receipt of your enlightened teachings. Yet I, Weixing, have been grossly remiss and lax in my duties, and have not lived up to the obligations of a host. My anger [at such a realization] knows no bounds. I humbly beg that your virtuous grace may accord me a magnanimous and liberal forgiveness for all my oversights. I shall be much obliged for such redemption. I respectfully offer to you as a present an everyday photograph of my debased appearance. May you take it back to your country and not feel a sense of

loathing and revulsion when you look at it. It will also help you remember my country. The most commendable thing that your Excellency did was to employ the people of Khotan, much to their good fortune.

I send this missive in haste, so that it may reach you soon. With respect and wishes for your promotion.

The sixth day of the seventh month in the thirty-fourth year of Guangxu of the Great Qing  
[August 2, 1908]

### **3) Prince Zailan, Urumchi, to Paul Pelliot, September 7, 1908**

Intended for the perusal of my distinguished friend: Last year we met in the northern court [i.e., Urumchi], where we rejoiced in wine and food. Holding hands as we engaged in pleasant conversation about antiquity and our present age, we took no notice of how quickly time passed by. But then you mounted your steed and ventured eastward, and I have not stopped mourning your absence. A distant road stands between us, cutting off all news and tidings of your well being. As summer changed into fall, however, I received the favor of your esteemed letter and learned that last winter you ventured into the desert sands, braving bitter winds and snow and all the difficulties of the road. Hearing of this made me utterly despondent. In the spring you took your rest at Dunhuang, touring the ancient grottoes with joy, gazing upon the Buddhist relics with reverence, and tracing the remnants of steles with your hand. In antiquity, this land was a conduit to the western territories, with two thousand years of history. Envoys were sent forth during Han times, while men of the Tang worshipped the Buddha there. These glorious remains of antiquity are sufficient to induce an unrestrained passion for collecting. The solemn teachings of the Buddha stand in the never-ending shadow of the Jade Pass. An erudite scholar and lover of antiquity such as yourself can stroll about their midst, scale dangerous cliffs and forbidding peaks, and grab hold of texts to verify the histories. I believe that, having thoroughly studied the vicissitudes of antiquity to the present and mastered those of both East and West, you will one day compose a great record of your travels, one destined to become a brilliant work of literature that stuns the world. Your study of these forgotten manuscripts will contribute to the progress of humanity and shine a glorious light on our frontier landscape. I understand that you are traveling to the capital through Shaanxi. From here, I can only gaze out at such a distance and long for grace at my banishment. Your ignorant brother is securely ensconced along the frontier. Fortunately, I enjoy good health at all times and maintain a decent appetite. But I do have some news to pass along to you. I have already photographed the complete work of Mr. Pei Lanting [Jingfu] and shipped one copy to the steward of my Beijing residence, with instructions to forward it along to your handlers for your eventual perusal. If it is convenient for your Grace, please take a moment to share further news with me. I look forward to such tidings with impatience. I hope you receive this reply and once more send you declarations of my feelings. Please also convey my inquiries and wishes to Mr. Vailant and Mr. Nouette, and ask their forgiveness for not having written to them separately.

Signed by Zailan on the twentieth day of the eighth month

#### **4) Dai Chengmo, Keriya, to Aurel Stein, December 6, 1913**

In years past, I traveled through Russia, Germany, and Austria, among other countries, the Mediterranean Sea, and numerous ports of call. I have friends all throughout the world, and no lack of able and impressive men among them. In the year *guiyou* [1913] at Yutian [Keriya], I obtained a friend in Mr. Stein, a great official of British education. He is a superior man, morally upright, highly educated, and with a vast knowledge and understanding of all things ancient. Reading his essays and books today elicits a deep sense of respect and admiration. I am sending along a little picture to serve as a token memento.

The sixth day of the twelfth month of the second year of the Great Republic of China  
[December 6, 1913]

Written by Changsha native Dai Chengmo, dispenser of moral guidance to the people and Magistrate of Yutian [Keriya] County, Xinjiang

#### **5) Li Shurong, Barikol, to Aurel Stein, October 1914**

To the learned scholar Mr. Stein of England: On October 3, 1914, you arrived at Barikol. Across multiple meetings over several days, I was able to see that you are a man of outstanding character and broad mind, unsurpassed in elegance and refinement. A man like you must rise above the worthiest men of his country from a young age. I saw the ink traces of the Han and Tang dynasties that you have collected. In spite of their tattered condition, the essence of antiquity is variously evident, as if the faces of the ancients stood right before me. You, Mr. Stein, do not shirk from any danger or obstacle in scouring grottoes or collecting wooden slips. In pursuit of these things, you practice archaeology with a stunning perseverance and thoroughness that is unheard of. Standing in deep admiration of your formidable mind and wishing to partake of its bounty, I detest the late hour of our gathering. ... Now that you are leaving I present to you my portrait as a token of remembrance and repeat my expressions of deep admiration.

#### **6) Wang Min, Shule (Kashgar), to Aurel Stein, 1925**

I, Wang Min, the magistrate of Shule County in Xinjiang Province within the Great Republic of China, send my regards and gratitude in this letter to the most erudite and esteemed Dr. Stein, of the British Empire.

My dear Sir, last year Consul S[krine] returned home due to the death of his father. I entrusted to him an ornate ceramic Chinese flower vase, as an expression of my love and affection for a close friend. Yet how can such petty trifles serve as sufficient thanks? Yesterday I received a letter in the Sino-British mail from the consulate at Kashgar, along with two printed maps of antiquities. Please accept my deep and unflinching gratitude for these.

Regarding my late father, he was reappointed as magistrate of Shule County in the fifth month of the eleventh year of the Republic [May 1922], and served there until his death on the fifth day of the third month in the fourteenth year [March 5, 1925]. Thereupon, I took up his post, and Governor Yang appointed me to administer the

county. As a result, my father never got a chance to read your letter in person. This is cause for enormous regret. If only he could have seen it with his own eyes before he passed away, who knows how high his exuberance would have enabled him to leap? Whenever I think of my late father, I recall how every time he chatted with his friends, he would suddenly change the topic to talk about your broad learning and thorough understanding of Eurasia, and he would narrate your travels in Xinjiang. He singled out for particular praise your steadfast determination to succeed despite untold sufferings unimaginable to others. Truly, these were things that no one else could measure up to. I used to listen in on these conversations from the side, and became quite familiar with them.

Now I have before me the maps you so graciously sent me, along with your precious portrait. They elicit feelings of intense adoration and reverence in me. I believe that all the books you have written about your expeditions in Xinjiang are destined to become the subject of deep respect among learned men, who will compete with one another to purchase and read them. In addition, the history of Xinjiang in China since Han and Tang times has also indirectly benefitted from your investigations. These are not insignificant accomplishments. Surely the situation is not unlike when paper became expensive in Luoyang?

Xinjiang Minister of Finance Pan [Zhen] is now nearly eighty years old, yet his body and mind are still sound. I have already written a letter to him passing along your regards. It is my great misfortune and an enormous regret not to have the honor of meeting you in person. I can only send in reply my sincerest gratitude and wishes for your health, and that you will at all times meet with prosperity.

I, Wang Min, the third son of the departed Wang Xujun, take off my cap and bow