

## **Kumárajèva: Historical Context and Biography**

The Tarim basin is ringed with oases which owe their existence to snow-fed streams from the northern glaciers of the Kunlun and the southern slopes of the Tien Shan. These are highly fertile areas, ideal for settlements and due to ease of irrigation, communities of great antiquity and city states flourished here.

The Tarim basin is located at a crossroads and its culture came to reflect a peculiar syncretism of various heterogenous civilisations. It was through this region that Buddhism was introduced into China, initially by missionary translators of Parthia and Sogdia. This transmission also received impetus due to the expansion of the Kuúáïa Empire, when Buddhist monks from the territories of the Kuúáïa and Northwest India travelled east and itinerant Buddhists from Kuqa, Khotan and China went west along the Silk Route. Kumárajèva hailed from Kuqa and his contribution to this process of transmission was profound and lasting in impact.

This paper examines the historical context of Kumárajèva life and work, based particularly on his biography maintained in the *Gaosengxhuan* compiled by Huijiao.