

**A Sogdian from the Sea:
Maritime Transport in the Eighth Century According to *The Pilgrimage Record of
Vajrabodhi***

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Sogdian merchants were known for their activities overland along the Silk Road. However, based on circumstantial evidence, there is a high probability that they were also involved in sea trade. In this paper, mainly based on the text, *The Pilgrimage Record of Vajrabodhi*, we examine the maritime transportation system used by the Sogdians to travel to Tang China in the eighth century. We also explore the relationship between the maritime trade activities of the Persian and Sogdian merchants at the time.

The fall of the Sasanian Empire led to the formation of a Persian diaspora. The consequence was emigration in all geographical directions and, from the second half of the seventh century to the first half of the eighth century, an upsurge in maritime activities in the Indian Ocean. In Sogdiana, however, Arab attacks from around the eighth century onwards gave rise to a diaspora, and the Sogdian merchants, in order to avoid the chaos on overland routes, appear to have made considerable efforts to use alternative maritime routes. One such Sogdian who embarked on maritime trade appears in *The Pilgrimage Record of Vajrabodhi*. This merchant travelled to Kanchipuram in South India, which had active trade relations with Southeast Asia; from there he went to Ceylon and then set out towards China using the trade routes of Persian merchants. This provides evidence for the fact that the Sogdians worked alongside Persian merchants when using maritime trade routes.

In addition, *The Pilgrimage Record of Vajrabodhi* may offer clues based on two pieces of sandalwood bearing Pahlavi inscriptions and Sogdian brands, which have been preserved in the Horyuji Temple in Nara. According to previous research, they were brought to Japan in the eighth century. These brands suggest the possibility that Sogdian merchants engaged in maritime trade in the eighth century. But it is difficult to corroborate this evidence with historical documents. Nonetheless, *The Pilgrimage Record of Vajrabodhi*, which is contemporaneous with the Horyuji sandalwood, clearly indicates that Sogdian merchants were engaged in maritime trade relating to the distribution of the sandalwood in the eighth century. Therefore, it is not impossible that they were in contact with Persian merchants.