

Remarks at Launching of Gandhara's Smile

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Distinguished Guests

Welcome to the today's launching of "*Gandhara's Smile*". On behalf of my colleagues, I would like to congratulate renowned Chinese scholars and experts for this publication. I would also like to express our thanks to friends from Shanghai Publication Group who have travelled from Shanghai for this event. This is indeed a product of untiring efforts of more than one year. Their pilgrimage to various historical places in Pakistan from Taxila to Peshawar, from Swat to Mardan has made this publication an authoritative account about history, art and architecture of Gandhara civilization. This tour of cultural Relics in Pakistan is indeed labour of love demonstrating your passion for this ancient Buddhist civilisation and as well as Pakistan-China friendship.

I am confident that this work would spearhead the academic debate in China on ancient history of Pakistan and inspire more such scholarly expeditions in future.

Distinguished Guests,

A nation without a sense of history is like an individual without memory. History is not merely a compendium of facts or figures; it is a connection with our past and shapes our future. And the most enduring linkages with the history is to preserve and promote the relics of past dotted in Taxila, Swat, Multan, Mohenjodaro, Datong, Xi'an, Nanjing and here in Beijing.

Besides introducing Buddhism to ancient China and the greater part of East Asia, Gandhara also made a rich contribution to embellish the rich cultural tapestry of modern Pakistan. As an heir to Indus Valley and Gandhara Civilizations, Pakistan is proud of its ancient past. As the birthplace of Gandhara civilisation, Pakistan has retained many of its traits reflected in progressive and pluralistic outlook.

Our government is making many efforts to promote the preservation and promotion of Pakistan's ancient culture, its Buddhist roots and endeavours like *Gandhara's Smile* would be of great help and guidance to us.

Dear Friends,

Gandhara civilisation must also be credited with the establishment of early linkages between Pakistan and China. Many Chinese monks including Fa Xian and Xuan Zang braved the treacherous mountains and scorching deserts to arrive at the famous Buddhist seminaries in Pakistan. They carried back with them not only the light of wisdom and spirituality but also the warm sentiments of brotherly love and respect which underlies our present fraternal ties.

Year 2021 is a special year when Pakistan and China are celebrating the 70th anniversary of establishment of our diplomatic ties. It is also an opportune moment to celebrate the achievements of ancient Gandhara civilisation as the common heritage of our two countries.

With this aim in mind, we are holding a Seminar on Ancient Civilisations of Pakistan and China in August this year. It would be organised by the Palace Museum and Department of Archaeology and Museum of Pakistan. We are also preparing for holding of a grand exhibition of Gandhara Artefacts at the Palace Museum next year.

Distinguished Guests,

The best way of paying our tribute to our ancient past could be to continue further research into ancient civilisations of our two countries and unravel their secrets still shrouded in the mystery of time.

I am confident that School of Foreign Studies of Peking University would continue its remarkable contribution to undertake a joint research of Pakistan's ancient past. Embassy of Pakistan would keep extending its complete support and assistance in continuing this march of exploration and discovery.