

Zhang Qian was the first person to bring back a clear account of Dayuan... [T]he emperor [Han Wudi] questioned various Xiongnu who had surrendered to the Han and they all reported that the Xiongnu had defeated the king of the Yuezhi people and made his skull into a drinking vessel. As a result the Yuezhi had fled and bore a constant grudge against the Xiongnu.... [Han Wudi] decided to try to send an envoy to establish relations with the Yuezhi.... Zhang Qian who was a palace attendant at the time... was appointed as envoy.

[Zhang Qian set out on a journey west but he was captured by the Xiongnu and held there for more than ten years. Finally he escaped and traveled to Dayuan.]

The king of Dayuan had heard of the wealth of the Han empire and wished to establish communication with it.... [Zhang Qian said to him:] "If I can reach my destination and return to the Han to make my report, the Han will reward you with countless gifts!"...

Zhang Qian in person visited the lands of Dayuan, the Great Yuezhi, Daxia, and Kangju, and in addition he gathered reports on five or six other large states in the neighborhood. All of his information he related to the emperor on his return....Zhang Qian was the first person to bring back a clear account of Dayuan...

-Sima Qian, "Zhang Qian's Journey West" (circa 145-190 BCE) excerpt.