

## **Silk Road as a Space of Eurasian Cultural Communication and Transmission**

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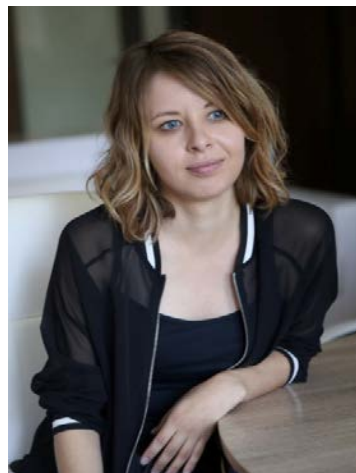
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**ABSTRACT**

**Sergey Alexandrovich Komissarov, Tang Chung, Alexander Ivanovich Soloviev, Maria Andreevna Kudinova.** *Silk Road as a Space of Eurasian Cultural Communication and Transmission.* We communicate our archaeological findings made in several burial complexes along the ancient Silk Road along with the analysis of the recent discoveries of other teams. Our research proves the special role of the Silk Road in Eurasian economic and political mutual influence, communication and transmission since Western Han dynasty. Sogdian and Middle East influence on Chinese culture was substantial and its importance cannot be underestimated. But even more importantly, during Tang dynasty, Europeans and Northern Eurasian representatives also influenced Chinese society and culture strongly, with some of them serving at the Chinese imperial court. Our findings are even more important in the context of the New Silk Road initiative announced recently by Xi Jinping ("One Belt, One Road").

**Key words:** Silk Road, One Belt – One Road, Eurasian integration, culture, Chinese expansion

**РЕЗЮМЕ**

**Сергій Александрович Комиссаров, Тань Чунь, Александр Иванович Соловьев, Марія Андреевна Кудинова.** *Великий Шелковый Путь как место евразийской культурной коммуникации и обмена.* Мы сообщаем о наших археологических находках, сделанных в нескольких могильниках вдоль древнего Шелкового пути, а также анализируем недавние находки других коллективов. Наши исследования доказывают особую роль Шелкового пути в евразийском экономическом и политическом взаимном влиянии, культурном общении и передаче культурных стереотипов и ценностей со времен династии Западная Хань. Согдийское и ближневосточное влияние на китайскую культуру было существенным, и его значение нельзя недооценивать. Но еще важнее то, что во времена династии Тань европейцы и выходцы из Северной Евразии также оказали сильное влияние на китайское общество и культуру, а некоторые даже служили при китайском императорском дворе. Еще большее значение наши выводы приобретают в контексте программы "Новый Шелковый путь", о которой недавно объявил Си Цзиньпинь ("Один пояс, один путь").

**Ключевые слова:** Шелковый путь, Один пояс – один путь, Евразийская интеграция, культура, китайская экспансия

ONE OF THE MAIN AXES ALONG WHICH EURASIAN CIVILISATIONS were developing for many centuries (at least since the second century BC), was the Silk Road (Komissarov et al. 2018). The term is relatively late, but using it, scientists successfully described the processes of trade and cultural exchange. Over the past two decades, striking findings were made in China. They were burial places of the Sogdians. These discoveries attracted the attention of scientists around the world.

Several hundreds of books and articles were published in periodicals. These materials have to be interpreted and comprehended at least preliminarily. After the findings concerned, the Silk Road as a scientific cultural problem has gained additional relevance. First, the Silk Road was an old successful historical experience of true multiculturalism, the crisis of which we now witness in Eurasia. Second, in 2012, the Chinese leader Xi Jinping put forward the concept of “One Belt, One Road” (一帶一路 initiative) which became the basis of the strategy of modern Chinese economic expansion in Eurasia and thereby contributed to the study of all aspects of this problem, including the historical and cultural ones.

The history of transcontinental cultural contacts in Eurasia and their role in the development of nationalities that inhabited contact zones, have been actively studied by archaeologists since the end of the nineteenth century. As a starting point, we take the expedition of Dmitry Alexandrovich Klements in 1898, that was directed to Xinjiang. It was Xinjiang that has been acting as a link between the eastern and western regions in Eurasia for many centuries. At the beginning of the twentieth century, archaeological sites of Northwest China were actively studied by expeditions led by M. A. Stein, S. F. Oldenburg, P. Pelliot, Otani Kozui, S. Hedin, and others; since 1930s they were gradually replaced by Chinese researchers.

The main theoretical basis for the interpretation of the data obtained was the concept of the Silk Road advanced by the outstanding German geographer Ferdinand von Richthofen in 1877. The concept satisfactorily explained historical and geographical factors of Eurasian communication and transmission along the Silk Road dating back at least to the reign of the Western Han dynasty.

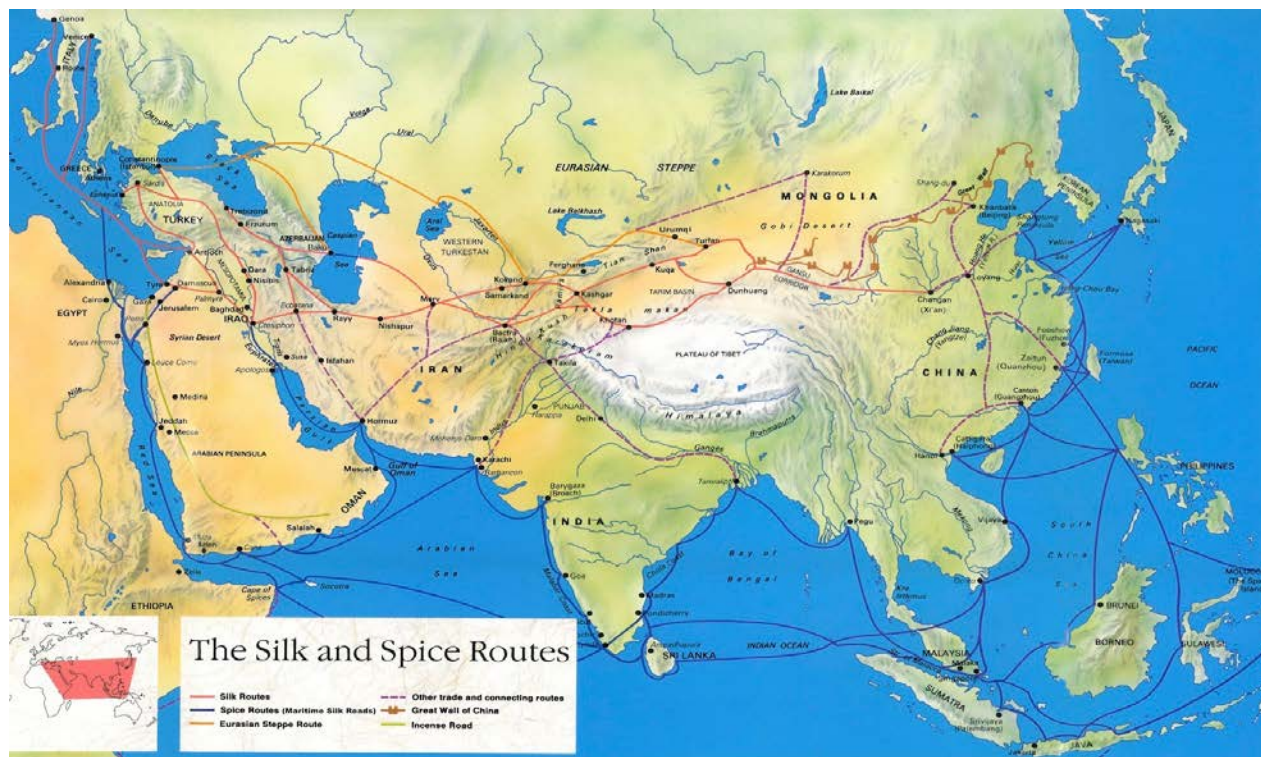


Fig. 1. The classical understanding of the Silk Road and maritime (“Spice”) roads connecting Tang Chinese Empire with the rest of Eurasia.

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The designated channel for the exchange of tangible and spiritual values was in force for many generations (Fig. 1). It acquired special importance during the eras of centralised dynasties Han and Tang. The enormous volume of innovations assimilated through the Silk Road exchange is clearly shown in the fundamental work of Edward H. Schafer (1963). Similar to the Silk Road concept of Eurasian development, various attempts were made to create cultural interaction models for both the earlier period (Jade Road) and for the later period (Tea Road), albeit with less success. For the last century, the stages in the archaeological study of contacts between Central Asia and the interior regions of China, basically coincided with the periodisation of the development of Chinese archaeology (Derevyanko [ed.] 2016, vol. 1, 19-55; Molodin, Komissarov [eds.] 2019).

The data on early Jade Road give us opportunity to discuss ancient roots of eastern routes as an integral part of Eurasian intercontinental exchange. Jades have been one of the finest symbolic vessels in the East since prehistory. In recent years, a large amount of nephrite accessories have been excavated from Neolithic – Bronze Age archaeological sites in Northeast China, Cis-Baikal, and the Russian Far East. Rings and disks are the majority of such nephrite accessories (Derevyanko et al., 2019). The similarities and differences in their geological sources, production history, and contexts of use pose important questions for how the symbolic use of nephrite dispersed and evolved in the “Jade Road” of Northern Eurasia during the Neolithic and Bronze Age. Two major systems of nephrite



drilling technologies in prehistoric Eurasia have been proposed, each with distinct but also regionally overlapping geographical distributions. One of these drilling technologies was discussed in the book *Prehistoric Technology* (Semenov 1970). Professor Semenov conducted a comprehensive analysis of perforation technology of the Glazkovo jade rings and disks in the early Bronze Age. His proposed technology, which consists of tracing nephrite raw material using a circular-shaped outline to create round nephrite rings and disks, have been found in many Neolithic sites in Siberia and the Russian Far East. Interestingly, this type of white translucent nephrite rings and disks were also distributed eastward and were unearthed across northeast China (Tang Chung, Komissarov 2016). Currently, we can confirm at least six sites with related nephrite artifacts, including: (1) Hake, Inner Mongolia, (2) Dongwuzhuer, Inner Mongolia, (3) Xinxingxiang, Jilin (4) Wangtun, Heilongjiang, (5) Daqiao, Wuyuer River, Heilongjiang, (6) Gaotu, Nanbaoli, Inner Mongolia. These jade artifacts are dated to 4000 ~ 5000 BP. The semi-finished *bi*-shaped objects unearthed in Gaotu and Daqiao sites are thought to be evidence of the widespread use of Glazkovo technology in Northeast China. The provenance of these raw materials is the white and greenish-white nephrite found in Lake Baikal. It is fascinating that the raw materials sourced from Lake Baikal were exchanged through thousands of km and were consumed deep in the Horqin grassland of Inner Mongolia.



Fig. 2. Sogdia, or Sogdiana was a part of so-called Transoxiana, Central Asian region very intimately connected with the Greek legacy of Alexander the Great. The borders are shown for the Western Han dynasty times. Previously, it was a province of Medo-Persian empire. In Tang times, it was controlled by Muslim nomadic tribes without a centralised state power. During late Tang dynasty, Sogdia was a part of Samanid empire.

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Observing the dispersal and cultural usage of jade in a holistic picture, we can see that in approximately 4,000 BP, a very widespread cultural development was occurring in northern Eurasia along with the Seima-Turbino phenomenon: with Gaotu site serving as the frontier of the southward cultural dispersal of Glazkovo jade, and the Lake Baikal being the heart of Glazkovo culture, white translucent nephrite objects and its raw materials were found across thousands of kilometers across the northern part of Eurasia. With the most western example being Seima site in Eastern Europe, and the most eastern example being Gaotu site in Inner Mongolia, these nephrite objects were all sourced from Lake Baikal and were produced in a very similar fashion. Such astonishing cultural exchange and dispersal of jade across Northern Eurasia is a great wonder in the history of mankind. As such, this “jade road” can be regarded as a technological revolution with worldwide influence in prehistory.

And this experience played an important role during the process of constructing of Silk Road as a whole network of transcontinental trade and cultural exchange. It developed not only westward, but also in the Northern and Eastern directions, including South and East Siberia, Korea and Japan (Esenbel S. [ed.] 2018; Rosén 2009). And historical (including archaeological) studies serves as background for development of modern relations (Hwang 2016; Jacques 2018; Römer 2020; Murashkin 2020; etc.).

Return to archaeological basis, we are to underline that in the first decades of the twenty-first century, a whole series of burial complexes belonging to the Sogdians<sup>2</sup> built at the time of the Northern Zhou, Sui and Tang dynasties (Li Yusheng 2016), was discovered (Figs. 3; 4). That caused a rise in scientific interest to the problems of cultural interaction along the Silk Road in the Middle Ages and its influence on subsequent development of Eurasia. Excavations of these richest burials have sparked a surge in scholarly interest to similar items in museum collections, as well as to the study of ordinary burials belonging to the same ethnic and sometimes kin group.

The results of the excavations were promptly published not only in Chinese, but also in some European languages. That became an additional factor of their wide distribution in the scientific community. In particular, Russian archaeologists used artefacts and images from the tombs of An Jia, Yu Hong (Fig. 3), Shi Jun to reconstruct the costume (Yatsenko 2009), belts (Azbelev 2010), hairstyle (Pankova 2011) of the Iranian and Turkic peoples of the sixth-eighth centuries. We have also published several articles briefly presenting specific graves with all their paraphernalia and inventory (see also Fig. 4). In the current work, we are expounding approaches to their interpretation (Komissarov et al. 2014; 2015; Kudinova et al. 2016).

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<sup>2</sup> Using the term here is conditional, since in addition to the Sogdians proper, the group included Iranians and representatives of other ethnic groups. However, they all performed similar intermediary functions, in which the people from Sogdiana held leading positions. Sogd, or Sogdiana was the eastern part of Iranian World (Fig. 2).



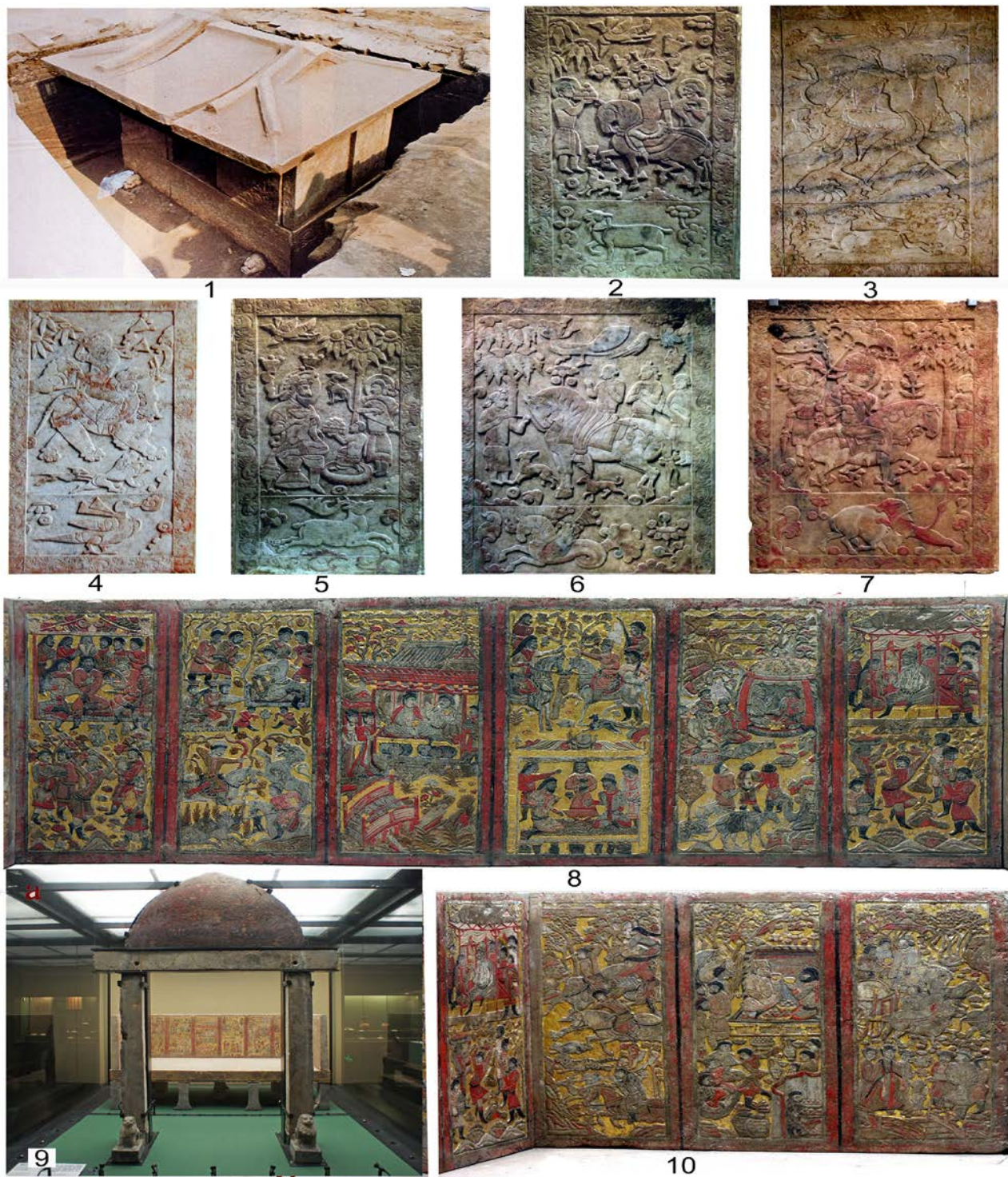


Fig. 3. 1-7 – sarcophagus and marble plates from the tomb of Yu Hong (Historical Museum of Shaanxi Province, Xian); 8-10 – funeral bed and colored plate from the tomb of An Jia (Museum of Shanxi Province, Taiyuan). All photos were made by A. I. Soloviev.





Fig. 4. The images of “Western barbarians” (Iranians or Sogdians). 1, 4 – from Historical Museum of Shaanxi Province, Xian; 2 – from Museum of Shanxi Province, Taiyuan; 3 – from National Museum of China; 5 – from Huangyuan County’s Museum of Ancient road. Photos were made by A. I. Soloviev (1-4) and M. A. Kudinova (5).

In our work, we apply the interdisciplinary social-science theory and methodology. We mainly focus not on internal, but on external factors that influenced the course of Eurasian cultural communication and transmission along the Silk Road. In methodology of the study, we have to take into account two following considerations. The first is associated with an increasingly ambiguous assessment of globalisation, the crisis of the ideology of multiculturalism, ever-increasing flow of migrants, who, for the most part, do not accept any cultural adaptations and transmission. In the PRC, there are plenty of works considering the aforementioned problems. However, most of the works by Chinese scholars consider Western countries, such as UK, Canada, USA (Han 2006; Yang 2007), while these challenges for PRC are mainly understood as external. And some rare studies on the globalisation appeared in last years are based mostly on the data about Chinese living abroad (Tao Wang 2020).

Some of the analysts, primarily in Hong Kong and Taiwan, emphasise the actualisation of these problems for China (Chun 2002). For such publications, it is important to emphasise not the Taiwanese specificity of the region, but its belonging to the Greater China area. The social changes in the global Eurasian community and their discussion serve additional stimuli for searching and studying materials related to the Silk Road of Middle Ages, when there was an intensive and very fruitful interaction of Chinese civilisation with other cultures and civilisations.

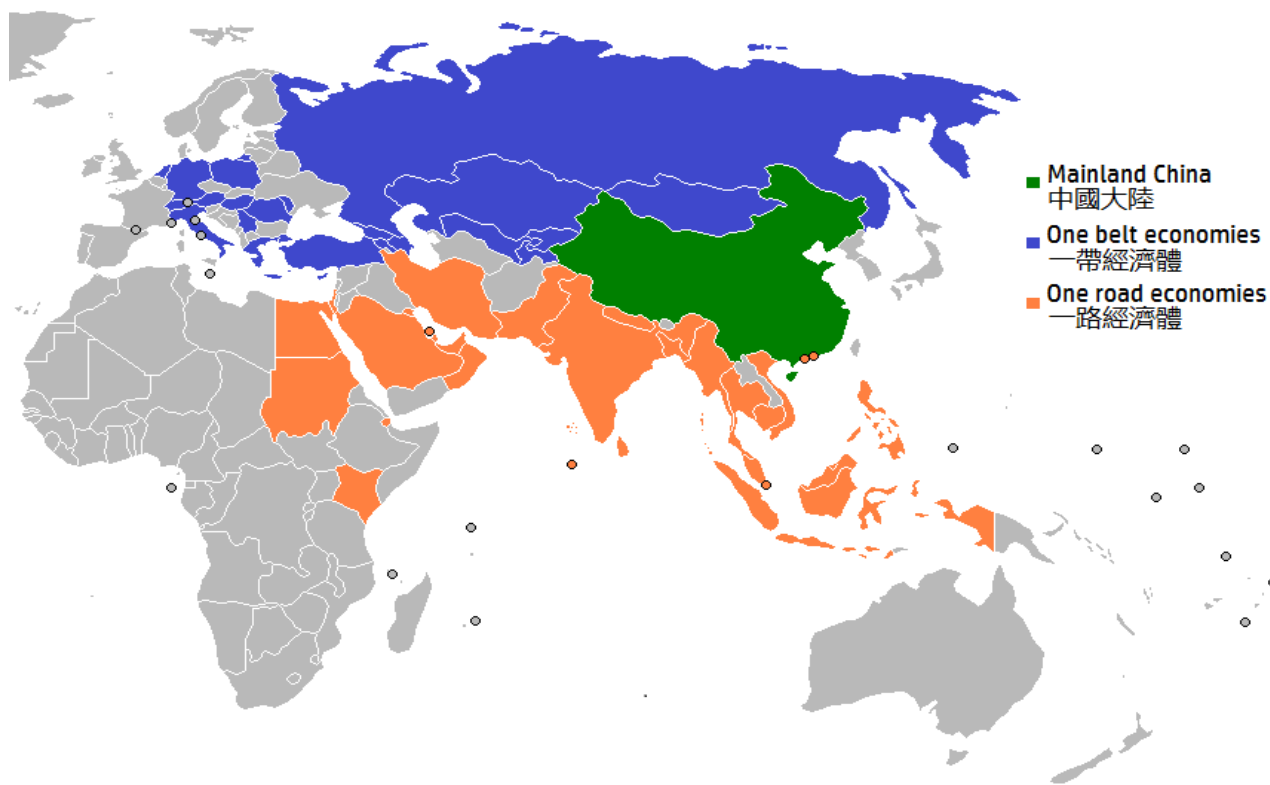


Fig. 5. One Belt – One Road initiative participants (as of 2019).  
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The use of modern anachronistic socio-political terminology to describe the situation of the past, is typical. As an example, one can point to the work of the American researcher K. Lingley (2014), who formulated the concept of “Sixth-Century Cosmopolitanism” when she was characterising the tomb of Xu Xianxu of 571 (Northern Qi dynasty). During this period, “new ideas, people and things poured into China along the Silk Road, fuelling the growth of an energetic multicultural society, decades before the cosmopolitan Tang dynasty was founded” (Lingley 2014, 10). Describing the social and religious situation in the Tang capital of Chang’an during its heyday, another American specialist, Professor of Yale University V. Hansen (2015) represented a cosmopolitan community tolerant of different religions in her book. At the same time, more careful authors, referring to the interpretation of the burial complexes of the Sogdians, still prefer to use the more neutral term “religious diversity” (Grenet 2007). The arrival of other religions was not forbidden, and often even was supported by the Chinese authorities. They were likely to involve certain elements of newcomers’ religious beliefs for the development of Chinese state ideology. The time of the ending of religious tolerance in China is also known. It was when numerous migrants to Chinese Empire began to demonstrate aggression against the Chinese. An instructive example was An Lushan Rebellion (755-763). After its suppression, all “foreign” religions were banned and gradually they even fell under persecution. However, that merely aggravated and accelerated the fall of the great Tang Empire. This medieval drama can be correlated with the modern events in EU very easily when millions of migrants from Near East and Mediterranean invade Europe. The example of Tang dynasty ought to be a warning for the European Union bureaucracy.

The focus on the modernization of research programmes concerning Eurasia becomes even more important within the Great Silk Road cultural studies. It is important to stress the connecting role of the Silk Road in Antiquity and the Middle Ages. Nowadays it is being actualised at a new level in the new Chinese mega-project “One Belt, One Road” (Fig. 5). The concept of the “Silk Road Economic Belt” was first formulated by the President of the People’s Republic of China Xi Jinping in his speech made on 7 September 2013 at Nazarbayev University in Astana (Kazakhstan). A month later, during his visit to Indonesia, Xi supplemented it with the concept of the “Maritime Silk Road of the twenty-first century.” In a very short period of time, this project was elevated to the status of the national idea in PRC, being spread to all spheres of life. Some experts introduced the term “New Silk Road diplomacy” (Contessi 2012), which was characterised by them as a great strategy of the “Xi Jinping’s era” (Fallon 2015; Ferdinand 2016; Wang 2016; Johnson 2016; Nie Wenjuan 2016) and regarded as a possible basis for the formation of a new global Eurasian system (Zhang 2017; Khan et al. 2018; Cheng Guo et al. 2019). The aforesaid experts analysed in detail geopolitical and geo-economic aspects of New Silk Route (Zhang Yunling 2015; Blanchard and Flint 2017; Summers 2016; Natulya 2019; Brands 2019), including regional level. Here, first of all, the problems of Xinjiang arose (Mackerras 2015; Hashmi 2019). During the last year specialist and politicians also published a lot of materials on the connection “One Belt, One Road” initiative with Chinese policy against



coronavirus and discussed the idea of a Health Silk Road (Glanz 2020; Wu, Wong 2020; Escobar 2020; Fazl-e-Haider 2020).

Many scholars, both Chinese (Wang 2016) and Russian (Syroezhkin 2016), specially highlighted an intercivilisational component of the New Silk Route project, which should be based on the mutual rich historical experience of many Eurasian peoples. Their position was summed up by the Chairman of the Board of the Russian-Chinese Centre for Trade and Economic Cooperation S. F. Sanakoev (2016, 18): “The Silk Road Economic Belt is a new civilizational doctrine, and not just a project of transport corridor”. The opinion of the expert community was accumulated in the speeches of several world leaders. President Vladimir Putin in his speech at the International Forum “One Belt, One Road” (Beijing, 14 May 2017) stressed: “The legendary Silk Road, which connected almost all parts of Eurasia went from oasis to oasis, from well to well, and in the famous Chinese *Book of Changes* with its rich and vibrant language, a well is an image that symbolises a source of vitality around which communication of people is built, trust is born, connections and friendship arise. This historical experience of cooperation and human mutual understanding is important for us in the twenty-first century, when the world is facing very serious problems and challenges” (International Forum OBOR).

After discussions at various summits, these ideas were converted into political and economic impulses and incentives, urging the scientific community to develop activities in priority areas. Various countries hosted conferences, symposia, publications on the topic of the Silk Road, including its historical and archaeological components. Considerable attention was paid to issues of methodology and terminology. The solution of these problems is intended to provide necessary tools for future research. Thus, the trans-ecological nature of the Silk Road was specially taken into consideration. The Silk Road, as it was demonstrated, connected not only agrarian and craft communities, but also settlement centres (cities, villages, hamlets) with tribes of steppe nomads and, to a lesser extent, forest hunters. The Silk Road connected Eurasia with several parts of Africa, effectively demonstrating that Sub-Saharan Africa may and should be regarded as a constituent of Eurasia (Christian 2000).

In his extensive article, Professor M. Canepa demonstrates the role of the political Eurasian elites (primarily at the level of a ruler and his retinue) of the three great empires (Roman-Byzantine, Sassanid and Sui-Tang) in the implementation of cross-cultural contacts, which led to very noticeable changes in rituals of the empires and its material embodiment. The author emphasises the favourable attitude of ruling elites of relatively small states (such as, for example, Sogdiana) to carry out intermediary functions, which also influenced their own culture (Canepa 2010). At the same time, commercial communities, primarily those of Sogdiana (Vaissière 2003), created their own institutions to meet the needs of transcontinental Eurasian trade, which Tang authorities had to accept at that time (Zhang and Elsner 2017).

The concept of Eurasian cultural communication and transmission with inevitable integration (Fig. 6) has its critics. E.g., a very eloquent article by Professor of the Free

University of Berlin H. Rezakhani denies the very existence of the Silk Road. He believes that, in scientific community, there is an unjustifiably expanded use of a modern historiographical concept. According to him, all information about various old Eurasian trade routes and centres is squeezed into that artificial concept, on the basis of which contacts between very distant Eurasian regions had been postulated. In Rezakhani's opinion, it does not correspond to reality (Rezakhani 2010).



Fig. 6. New Silk Route stratagem of 2019.

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In our opinion, the archaeologists who have made discoveries in recent years show the inconsistency of such assumptions. Lately, significant advances have been made in the study of archaeological and epigraphic monuments on the Silk Road, not only due to external factors, but also due to the internal development of science: setting new research tasks, using new methods. E.g., the study of glass beads from Xinjiang using X-ray fluorescence spectroscopy proved their western (mostly) origin. The earliest samples belonged to the Kushan area, and the later ones to the Sassanian one (Liu et al. 2012). The use of dendrochronological methods made it possible to date medieval findings in the territory of Qinghai province more accurately. Previously, it was believed *a priori* that the desolate lands around the lake Kukuinor were used only as an additional and temporary version of the Silk Road during the fifth-sixth centuries, when the Hexi corridor was blocked by

nomads. However, analyses of samples from wooden structures associated with the Qinghai Route dated the findings by seventh-eighth centuries AD, which proves its simultaneous use with the main route (Qiu 2016; Wang and Zhao 2013).

For Russian archaeologists, these conclusions are of particular importance, since many trade roads were connected with the Northern route of the Silk Road, going deep into Mongolia and southern Siberia. It can be assumed that they were also not temporary, but permanent within that era. Chinese bronze mirrors and coins, the remains of lacquerware and silk fabrics, together with iron swords with bronze crosshairs, found in the mounds of early nomads (Sargat culture) on the territory of Novosibirsk, Omsk and Tyumen regions near the main river routes, indicate the existence of a developed and stable exchange dated back to Han times. Goods were transported along these routes with the very likely participation of representatives of the producing country or some kind of foreign culture intermediaries who sent caravans towards the regions of Siberia abundant with valuable furs. Russian archaeologists often call these routes the “Fur Route” in aggregative sense by analogy with the Silk Route. Numerous archaeological sites of a later period, from the Sassanids to the Tang dynasty and beyond, in the steppes near river Iset (Ural) to river Unga (Baikal region) prove a high level of development of transit trade associated with the Silk Road.

Promising results have also been obtained by means of paleogenetic analysis. After studying the mitochondrial DNA of Yu Hong, one of the main “heroes” of the latest discoveries, scientists from Jilin University identified haplogroup U5 in him, which arises in the Middle East, but is represented mainly among the population of Europe, and his wife had haplogroup G, which is widespread in the territory East Asia (Xie et al. 2007). This was the first time when a typical western haplogroup was found so far to the east. In Europe, it is found most often among northern peoples (Estonians, Sami, Finns) and very rarely in Tajikistan and Xinjiang (Lovgren 2007). As for haplogroup G, it was never found in the West and only in the amount of 3-4% among the population of Central Asia. Of course, it would be premature to deduce direct contacts with the Finnish peoples from these observations. There is no doubt that a certain Caucasian by race served at the Tang court, and he was neither Sogdian nor Iranian.

A brief review of recent publications on the latest findings along the Silk Road reveals their exceptional source wealth. After the first euphoria from the acquisition of spectacular monuments, Chinese, and after them Western and Russian archaeologists began to study the burial structures and implements more consistently. The most promising is the analysis of the religious and mythological content of the painting and carving on the slabs of sarcophagi. The first steps in this direction have already been taken (e.g. Rose 2014; Gulácsi, Beduhn 2012/2016), but the complete reading of the texts encoded in the paintings is still to be done in the future. In addition, one should not only identify a certain Iranian or some other plot, but also trace its influence on the ideology and folklore of China, as well as, possibly, some other peoples who participated in cultural communication and transmission along the routes of the Great Silk Road.



Our future research will undoubtedly prove the tremendous economic and political unifying role of the old Silk Road in Eurasia.

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## EXTENDED SUMMARY

KOMISSAROV, SERGEY A., TANG, CHUNG, SOLOVIEV, ALEXANDER I., AND KUDINOVA, MARIA A. SILK ROUTE AS A SPACE OF EURASIAN CULTURAL COMMUNICATION AND TRANSMISSION. RECENTLY THE CHINESE GENERAL SECRETARY XI JINPING PUT FORWARD THE CONCEPT OF "ONE BELT, ONE ROAD" which became the basis of the strategy of modern Chinese economic expansion in Eurasia with the construction of "New Silk Road." The concept of the "Silk Road Economic Belt" was first publicly formulated by Xi Jinping in his speech made on 7 September 2013

at Nazarbayev University in Astana (Kazakhstan). A month later, during his visit to Indonesia, Xi supplemented it with the concept of the "Maritime Silk Road of the twenty-first century." In a very short period of time, this project was elevated to the status of the national idea in PRC, being spread to all spheres of life.

Some experts introduced the term "New Silk Road diplomacy", which was characterised by them as a great strategy of the "Xi Jinping's era" and regarded as a possible basis for the formation of a new global Eurasian system. The aforesaid experts analysed in detail geopolitical and geo-economic aspects of New Silk Route, including regional level. Here, first of all, the problems of Xinjiang arose. Although these experts may exaggerate the Chinese role in forming modern and especially future Eurasia, many scholars specially highlighted an inter-civilisational component of the New Silk Route project, which should be based on the mutual rich historical experience of many Eurasian peoples.

This makes studying cultural communication and transmission of Eurasian nationalities along the old Silk Road exceptionally relevant now. After discussions at various summits, the idea about the New Silk Road was converted into political and economic impulses and incentives, urging the scientific community to develop activities in priority areas. Various countries hosted conferences, symposia, publications on the topic of the Silk Road, including its cultural, historical and archaeological component. Considerable attention was paid to issues of methodology and terminology. The solution of these problems is intended to provide necessary tools for future research.

The trans-ecological nature of the Silk Road is shown in the current work. We base our research on studying burial complexes of the "Sogdians" understood in the collective sense. They include the Sogdians proper, Iranians, Turan peoples and various Eurasian groups beyond. Using the term here is conditional. However, representatives of all these nationalities performed similar intermediary functions, in which the people from Sogdiana held leading positions. The Silk Road, as we demonstrate in the paper, connected not only agrarian and craft communities, but also settlement centres (cities, villages, hamlets) with tribes of steppe nomads and, to a lesser extent, forest hunters. Besides, the Silk Road connected Eurasia with several parts of Africa, effectively demonstrating that Sub-Saharan Africa may and should be regarded as a constituent of Eurasia.

The considerable number of auxiliary trade roads associated with the Silk Road, were connected with its Northern route, going deep into Mongolia and southern Siberia. It can be assumed that they were also not temporary, but permanent within that era. Chinese bronze mirrors and coins, the remains of lacquerware and silk fabrics, together with iron swords with bronze crosshairs, found in the mounds of early nomads (Sargat culture) on the territory of Novosibirsk, Omsk and Tyumen regions near the main river routes, indicate the existence of a developed and stable exchange dated back to Han times. Goods were transported along these routes with the very likely participation of representatives of the producing country or some kind of foreign culture intermediaries who sent caravans towards the regions of Siberia abundant with valuable furs. Russian archaeologists often call these routes the "Fur Route" in aggregative sense by analogy with the Silk Route. Numerous archaeological sites of a later period, from the Sassanids to the Tang dynasty and beyond, in the steppes near river Iset (Ural) to river Unga (Baikal region) prove a high level of development of transit trade associated with the Silk Road.

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