

# GENESIS OF THE SILK ROAD AND ITS NORTHERN DIRECTIONS\*

## A SELYEMÚT EREDETE ÉS ÉSZAKI KAPCSOLATAI

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### Abstract

*This article argues that the conclusions in the prevailing modern literature on the formation of the Great Silk Road III-II thousand BC or the VI<sup>th</sup>-III<sup>rd</sup> Millennium BC cannot be considered reasonable in light of the available scientific and archival evidence. Until the 3<sup>rd</sup>-2<sup>nd</sup> c. BC at the western and northern borders of Xinjiang Region, the predominantly Caucasoid population of Xinjiang, contacted the related cultures of Kazakhstan and Sayano-Altai. However, it did not have any noticeable or documented trade (exchange) connections with the eastern Mongols of the Gansu Corridor, nor with farmers of ancient China and nomads of Northern China. According to the available archaeological records, significant migrations of the population from Xinjiang to China and in the opposite direction between the 3<sup>rd</sup> c. BC and the first half of the I<sup>st</sup> Millennium BC have not been observed.*

*The Silk Road from China through Xinjiang to the west by direct involvement of the Chinese only begins to function in the 1<sup>st</sup> c. BC, and then only when the Han Empire at great cost finally succeeded in pushing the Hunnu out of Xinjiang and established control over this territory. This event was preceded by active trade relations between the northern kingdoms of China and the nomads of southern Siberia in the 4<sup>th</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> c. BC and the delivery of the gifts to the Huns (Xiongnu) from the Han Dynasty in the 2<sup>nd</sup> c. BC. This enabled silk and varnish products to penetrate Southern Siberia, Central Asia, and then back into Xinjiang.*

### Kivonat

*Ez a tanulmány a Selyemút kialakulásának kérdéseivel foglalkozik. Véleményünk szerint a modern irodalomban felmerülő korai datálási kísérletek (Kr. e. III-II., sőt VI-III. évezred) nem fogadhatók el a rendelkezésre álló bizonyítékok (írásos és tárgyi források) tükrében. Egészen a Kr. e. 3-2. sz.-ig a Xinjiang tartomány északi és nyugati határai mentén alapvetően kaukázusi jellegű nagyraszba tartozó népesség ugyan kapcsolatban állt Kazahsztán és a Szaján-Altáj hegységek népességével, de nincs bizonyítékunk kereskedelmi kapcsolatokról a Gansu keleti mongol lakosságával vagy a régi kínai birodalom földművelőivel vagy az észak-kínai nomádokkal. Az ismert régészeti bizonyítékok alapján, a népesség jelentős vándorlása Xinjiang-ból Kínába és az ellenkező irányba nem volt megfigyelhető a Kr. e. I. évezred közepe és a Kr.e. 3. század között.*

*A kínaiak tényleges közreműködésével létrejött Selyemút nyugat felé, a Xinjiang területén keresztül csak a Kr.e. I évszázadtól működik, csak akkor, amikor a Han birodalom jelentős erőfeszítései nyomán kiszorítja a hunokat a Xinjiang tartományból és megszüldíti az ellenőrzést a terület felett. Ezt az eseményt megelőzték az aktív kereskedelmi kapcsolatok Kína északi királyságai és Dél-Szibéria nomádjai között a Kr.e. 4. és 2. században és a Han Dinasztia részéről a hunoknak (Xiongnu) szállított ajándékok a Kr. e. 2. század folyamán. Ennek során a selyem és lakk termékek eljutottak Dél-Szibériába, Közép-Ázsiába majd vissza Xinjiang területére*

KEYWORDS: THE SILK ROAD, XINJIANG, SOUTH SIBERIA, EARLY NOMADS, HAN, SCYTHIANS, PAZYRYK CULTURE, SAKA

KULCSSZAVAK: SELYEMÚT, XINJIANG, DÉL-SZIBÉRIA, KORAI NOMÁDOK, HAN DINASZTIA, SZKÍTÁK, PAZIRIK KULTÚRA, SZAKÁK

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### ***Statement of the problem and the purpose of the article***

The issues of the Great Silk Road (GSR) when functioning are treated in a considerable number of publications, but there are relatively few special works on the period of its formation. The lack of development of this issue is especially noticeable in the Russian-language literature. Regarding the history of the GSR proper, most researchers, as a rule, limit themselves to stating the previously known facts and follow the concepts of E.I. Lubo-Lesnichenko (Lubo-Lesnichenko, 1975, P. 145–149), supplemented by the research of Kuz'mina (Kuz'mina, 2010, P. 212–220) on the III-II thousand BC. The array of archaeological data that has been accumulated in recent decades, as well as anthropological and genetic research on ancient China and surrounding the Scythoid cultures, Xinjiang and Southern Siberia, is almost never used. First of all the importance of these new data is that it concerns the period of the 9<sup>th</sup>–3<sup>rd</sup> c. BC, immediately preceding the actual operation of the GSR through Xinjiang. Foreign researchers (including the Chinese) are more actively attracted by the archaeological materials and natural research results, which focus on the period of the 14<sup>th</sup>–1<sup>st</sup> c. BC and before (Bunker, 1991; Høisaeter, 2017).

Available data has revealed, however, that in the 2<sup>nd</sup> c. BC Xinjiang was dissected by nomads and caravans in all directions, so that a trade situation existed before the GSR on a smaller, more diffused scale. From this standpoint, before the route through Xinjiang existed (it is generally accepted to be the shortest way from the West to Ancient China in the 2<sup>nd</sup> c. BC) an intensive, mutual and opportunistic exchange and trade already took place in which the peoples from China traded with India, Rome and the Black Sea coast, as well as the oasis city-states located in Xinjiang<sup>1</sup>.

In addition, more and more research has now appeared in China (including, anthropological and genetic studies) that has revealed the penetration of the Mongoloid population in the Bronze Age into the Hami area and further west, as well as a significant proportion of Mongoloid admixture on the monuments of eastern Xinjiang (see Wei Lanhai, Li Hui, Xu Wenkan, 2015). This research accurately describes the ongoing movement of

Mongoloids in Xinjiang from east to west. It is not surprising that the overwhelming majority of earlier researchers of the GSR were unaware of these events, that took place in the III<sup>rd</sup>–II<sup>nd</sup> Millennium BC and which resulted in the polarization of the Europoids of Xinjiang and of the Mongoloids who inhabited China and the Gansu Corridor.

Only a few researchers have noted the important ethnocultural peculiarity of this region, which is also the characteristic of Mongolia (see Shulga, 2012). For supporters of the earlier view, the problem was seen only in obtaining new data to substantiate the early stages of the creation of the GSR in the III<sup>rd</sup>–II<sup>nd</sup> Millennium BC. It is difficult to support such a one-sided approach, both because of the hypothetical nature of these views, and because they are based on incomplete evidence of the phenomenon of the GSR. Similar scientific works and the mass media accepting these theories have jointly created an accepted opinion about the existence of the GSR long before the era of good, safe roads along which numerous, regular caravans with silk goods could have moved westward.

The point of view of such well-known experts such as Nicolo Di Cosmo and Victor H. Mair, who share our belief on the existence of the early periods of the Silk Road formation in the III<sup>rd</sup>–II<sup>nd</sup> Millennium BC, seems more acceptable (Di Cosmo, 2014). These researchers suggest that the actual GSR only begins to function in the manner described in the earlier research in the 1<sup>st</sup> c. BC (Di Cosmo, 2014, p. 18; Sen, Mair, 2012, p. 105–108). However, here we can also see the unreasonable extension of the concept of the “Silk Road” to only the supposed social contacts through Xinjiang in the III<sup>rd</sup>–II<sup>nd</sup> Millennium BC.

The available historical sources, as well as the archaeological, anthropological, and genetic data, show that the actual trading practices in Xinjiang differed significantly from those mentioned in the current literature. As such, the GSR proper with regular silk trade from China through Xinjiang cannot be said to have been formed earlier than the 1<sup>st</sup> c. BC. Recent archaeological data from Xinjiang has a particular importance, here a significant number of Scythian tombs have been investigated, and the data they contained has only been published in the last decades. The majority of these tombs are located at the Northern Embankment Road near the northern Silk Road route (see Han Jianye, 2007; Shulga, 2010; Zhang Tenan et al., 2016). The authors of this research proposed, but have yet to present, a detailed substantiation of these results in a monographic study that consolidates a significant body of sources. This article presents the main provisions of the concept of the Silk Road formation and its northern directions in the I<sup>st</sup> Millennium BC and also considers controversial viewpoints on this issue from Russian and foreign

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<sup>1</sup>Recently published work on active participation in the development of the Silk Road of local oases and appearing in Xinjiang from the 5th c. B.C. city-states, is of undoubted interest (Tomas Larsen Høisaeter, 2017). However, the author confined himself to archaeological materials of only two areas near the Bagrashkol Lake and the Keriya River. This data is not enough to build a cogent concept. )

researchers from Europe, the USA, China, and South Korea.

### **Research results**

Supporters of the concept of the early formation of the Silk Road from China to the western and northern directions through Gansu and Xinjiang proceed from the information about the existence of the "lazurite" and "jade" routes from the II<sup>nd</sup> Millennium BC, this involves documented cases of the detection of Chinese silk fabrics to the west of Xinjiang as well as ancient written resources and with the benefit of hindsight well-documented details of the known routes of the established Silk Road of the I<sup>st</sup> Millennium BC.

In Russian literature, the most comprehensive rationale for the emergence of the GSR from the III<sup>rd</sup>-II<sup>nd</sup> Millennium BC was suggested by E.I. Lubo-Lesnichenko (Lubo-Lesnichenko, 1985; 1989; 1994). He also outlined and partly described the real and prospective trade routes from China and Western Asia through Xinjiang in the northern direction to South Siberia. As demonstrated by the available academic and popular science publications, the conclusions and assumptions of E.I. Lubo-Lesnichenko have been accepted to varying degrees by almost all Russian-speaking specialists. As a rule, his view on the early formation of the GSR, the spread of silk to the west in the first half of the I<sup>st</sup> Millennium BC, the existence of the "western meridional" trade route in China plus information about the findings of Chinese products of the 4<sup>th</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> c. BC beyond it, is widely recited. Sometimes China's trade relations with South Siberia in the 4<sup>th</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> c. BC are mentioned along with the "Kyrgyz" and "Uigur" road. However, as yet there is no definitive research on their functioning in the I<sup>st</sup> Millennium BC included in the works of "Western" scholars who have analyzed the trade (exchange) relations of the northern kingdoms of China with Southern Siberia (Bunker, 1991, 1992; Juliano, 1991; Di Cosmo, 2014).

In this regard let us briefly examine the relevance of attributing the "Lapis-Lazuli" and "Jade" transits to the early stage of development of the GSR (Lubo-Lesnichenko, 1994), as well as possible impacts on the migrations of Europeans moving across Xinjiang from west to east in III<sup>rd</sup>-II<sup>nd</sup> Millennium BC (Kuzmina, 2010, p. 69, 87). Multidirectional "lazurite" and "jade" paths were not interconnected, and the assumption of their merging in the middle of the 5<sup>th</sup> c. BC (Latov, 2010, p. 124) requires verifiable evidence which as yet does not exist. There is also a need for more substantiated data on the periods of the extraction of these gemstones and the amount of jade that entered China from Khotan. A. Mamadazimov writes about the connection of the "jade" and

"lazurite" paths going westward by the Yuezhi (Mamadazimov, 2014, p. 12). In our opinion, the Yuezhi, after successive defeats by the Xiongnu, in the first half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> c. BC first paved the way through Xinjiang to Central Asia. However, according to all data, they moved more northward along the oasis of the Tian Shan, and not to the south along the Kun Lun region. It should be noted that the written evidence of these migrations is limited and refers to a later time, and as such the current theory for the period of III-II thousand BC is a result of reconstruction and is not based on facts.

We cannot agree with a proposition based on available material concerning the III-II thousand BC expounded by E.E. Kuzmina, who claimed that "the ancient discovery of the Great Silk Road, is confirmed by the eastward migration of the Caucasoid population to Xinjiang." (Kuzmina, 2010, p. 87). This author further states, "On the future tracks of the Great Silk Road, people, things, and ideas were spread. It is suggested that these phenomena are associated with the appearance of Afanasyevts in Siberia and Xinjiang ..." (ibid., P. 117). The subsequent influence of the Andronovs is associated with the penetration of bronze artifacts and chariots into Xinjiang metallurgy in China (ibid., P. 105), and she then concludes that "The established beginning of the contacts of the steppe tribes with the east along the route of the future GSR from the turn of the III<sup>rd</sup>-II<sup>nd</sup> Millennium BC allows you to push back the time of formation of the eastern route to antiquity." (ibid, p. 106).

It should be noted that most "Western" researchers accepted the viewpoint on the assignment of the initial stage of the Silk Road to the Bronze Age in various variations (see Tomas Larsen Høisæter, 2017, p. 340), including American researchers: "... according to the archaeological and written sources, it is clear that vast intercultural networks, including the movement of people, goods, and ideas, connected the central plain with the world long before the famous Silk Road was created. In the north and northwest, China maintained contact with nomadic tribes who contributed to bronze and iron metallurgy transfer. These tribes also transmitted riding skills and the technology needed to make chariots to people on the central plain (Tansen Sen, Victor H. Mair, 2012, p. 27)<sup>2</sup>.

Indeed, the data of anthropology, genetics, and archeology in Xinjiang unequivocally indicate the proximity of a part of the monuments of the Bronze

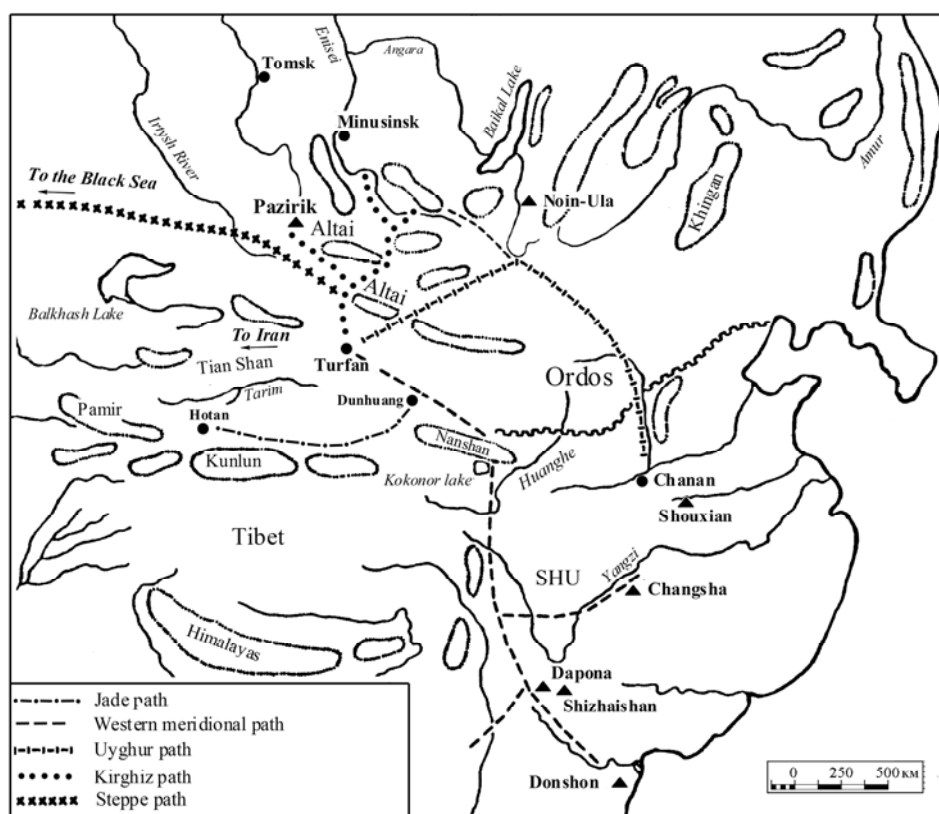
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<sup>2</sup>Notice that the northern direction is also mentioned, but preference is given to the western (northwestern) direction through Xinjiang. At the same time, the authors assign the role of a transfer link to nomads.)

Age studied there to the cultures of Central Asia (primarily Kazakhstan) and Western Siberia. Moreover, this is quite natural, since Caucasians from the west inhabited this territory. At that time, however, there were no apparent connections between ancient China's cultures or the Gansu corridor. There are only individual items from China, usually found outside the complexes. In other words, in one way or another, Caucasians of Xinjiang in the III<sup>rd</sup>-II<sup>nd</sup> Millennium BC maintained connections with related cultures in the western and northern directions. A similar situation persisted until the 3<sup>rd</sup>-2<sup>nd</sup> c. BC. The predominantly Caucasoid population of Xinjiang continued to communicate at the borders with the related cultures of Kazakhstan, Sayano-Altai, and Mongolia. However, until the end of the III c. BC, relations with China had not been established, including the closest to the eastern Shajing culture in Gansu (Shulga, 2010, pp. 108-110). There were infiltrations in the territory of Xinjiang open to the west and north (see Shulga, Shulga, 2015) and cultural interaction existed (Polosmak, 1989; Shulga, 2010), however, these are separate and unconnected events, and it would be erroneous to call these processes the start of the formation of the Silk trade route.

The possibility of the Silk Road functioning from the II<sup>nd</sup> Millennium BC, through the participation of herders (nomads) who lived along its route, was researched by the French scientist Francfort. Noting the impossibility of the existence of such a system on such a long path, he wrote: "In this regard, we can confidently say that the hypothesis about the ancient silk road is purely speculative (highlighted by the authors), although it can be noted that there were contacts at that time. The paradox is that the real silk road - the international route of huge trade between the East and the West - appeared in the 1<sup>st</sup> c. when the nomads (Parthians and Kushans) settled in the region between China, the Han Empire and the Roman Empire." (Francfort, 1989, p. 216-217).

Let us take a closer look at the concept of E.I. Lubo-Lesnichenko about the trade routes existence in the 4<sup>th</sup> c. BC from China to South Siberia through Gansu and Xinjiang, as well as from Western Asia to South Siberia through Turpan in the 6<sup>th</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> c. BC. This concept is based on the thesis of the existence of a "western meridional" trade route in China (**Fig. 1.**).



**Fig. 1.:** The proposed scheme of trade routes of the kingdoms of ancient China in the early Iron Age and the Middle Ages (see E. I. Lubo-Lesnichenko, fig. 116).

**1. ábra:** A kereskedelmi útvonalak rendszere a Kínai Birodalom irányába a korai vaskorban és a középkorban

This route linked the southeast of China with Gansu and Xinjiang (to Turfan). Further, according to E.I. Lubo-Lesnichenko, from Turfan in the 4<sup>th</sup> c. BC along the "Kyrgyz" road, the "roads" to the north went to the Minusinsk Basin and Gorny Altai (mainly, the territory of the Republic of Altai, Russia) (Lubo-Lesnichenko, 1989; 1994, fig. 116). In his research, the author included imports from Western Asia. The main route that connected South Siberia with the ancient civilizations of Western Asia was the path leading from Achaemenid Iran through the north of Eastern Turkestan to Tuva, Altai, and the Minusinsk Basin. Its northern part from Turfan is called the "Kyrgyz" way. The heyday of trade on this path refers to the 6<sup>th</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> c. BC. The beginning of the "Kyrgyz" way, judged by from E.I. Lubo-Lesnichenko, adjoined in the area of the city of Turfan, with the northern part of the "western meridional" route, along which silk fabrics and embroideries, Shu canvas and the Chu mirrors penetrated South Siberia from the state of Chu. An assumption was made about the connection of the said "Kyrgyz" path with the "steppe" path described by Herodot (Lubo-Lesnichenko, 1989, p. 8) (**Fig. 1.**).

So, E.I. Lubo-Lesnichenko believed that even before the VI c. BC, the trade route from Iran to South Siberia, functioned through Turfan, which reached it in the 6<sup>th</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> c. BC expansion (**Fig. 1.**). According to the constructions of E.I. Lubo-Lesnichenko this way in the 4<sup>th</sup> c. BC was supposed to be connected with the western segment of the "western meridional" path, since this was also the exit (according to the author) to the north along with the "Kyrgyz" path (**Fig. 1.**). Conforming to the concept of E.I. Lubo-Lesnichenko, in the 4<sup>th</sup> c. BC Silk road routes from two segments connecting in Turfan: 1) from the states of China through Gansu to Turfan, 2) from western Asia to Turpan. From Turfan there had to be a departure and a hypothetical "steppe" way to the west in the Kazakh steppes. A way through Asia through Turpan to Altai, according to E.I. Lubo-Lesnichenko, existed, at least from the 7<sup>th</sup> c. BC, since from 6<sup>th</sup> c. BC, its heyday, is celebrated. However, the author did not make the followed conclusion about the addition of an extensive route of the GSR already existing in the 4<sup>th</sup> c. BC, because he saw the inconsistency. The logic of the outline of E.I. Lubo-Lesnichenko directions of the GSR and its branches are quite understandable and straightforward: China and the countries of Asia Minor with their goods were located in the south; and in the north, in southern Siberia, Chinese and Western Asia goods were found in the burials of nomads dating from the 5<sup>th</sup>-early 3<sup>rd</sup> c. BC. These goods came to the north along some paths, most likely for E.I. Lubo-Lesnichenko looked already known medieval routes through Xinjiang. This last assumption, in our opinion, is his fatal argument

flaw; it is now seen as pure conjecture with no factual support. Note that in the above constructions of E.I. Lubo-Lesnichenko 6<sup>th</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> c. BC materials from Xinjiang itself are not cited, which is quite natural, since there are no written sources from Xinjiang at that time, and archaeological excavations have been actively conducted there only in recent decades.

The work of two scientists from China and the United States, based on so far unique findings from the Ma Ji Yuan, are of undoubted interest regarding the likelihood of real contacts in Prityanshany this northern route of the GSR was established in the 3<sup>rd</sup>-2<sup>nd</sup> c. BC (Yang Jianhua, Katheryn M. Linduff, 2013, p. 74). The Majia Yuan burial ground was explored near Tianshui in the southeast of Gansu Province (China). In several graves, a significant amount of original products made in the "animal style" were found (Gansu Provincial Institute of Cultural Relics and Archaeology, 2014; others). With some justification, these experts have suggested that they are close in style and production technology to products from the documented Issyk mound in southeast Kazakhstan (Yang Jianhua, Katheryn M. Linduff, 2013, p. 74). It was discovered that a woman from the Tian Shan and her dowry were buried in the M13 grave with a high concentration of such items (*ibid.*, p. 81). Based on data on the displacement of the Mongoloid population to the Hami era during the Bronze Age, the authors suggested the existence of an ancient path along the Tian Shan between Semirechye and China, through which Bronze Age artifacts from the west of Eurasia and from the Gansu corridor "slowly penetrated Xinjiang from the West and East. The connection probably was in Hami" (Yang Jianhua, Katheryn M. Linduff, 2013, p. 79). It should be emphasized that these researchers for the Bronze Age do not write about cross-cutting trade routes through Xinjiang, but only about contacts with the West and East of the peoples living along the Tian Shan.

Regarding the later finds in Majia Yuan, dated by them around the 3<sup>rd</sup>-2<sup>nd</sup> c. BC, and chronologically close to Alagou (Xinjiang) and the Issyk mound (Kazakhstan), an assumption was made about the direct movement of people from the Tian Shan to the territory of the state of Qin (Majia Yuan): "The Tian Shan mountains, apparently, at this time become an exchange channel - a prelude to the Silk Road of later periods" (*ibid.*, p. 81). Not all the authors' propositions can be accepted as fact, but, on the whole, an opinion based on the findings in Majia Yuan about the possible penetration of particular groups of people in the 3<sup>rd</sup>-2<sup>nd</sup> c. BC from the Tian Shan to the borders of the state of Qin, it is quite an acceptable deduction.

The expanded rationale for the addition of the Silk Road from the 5<sup>th</sup> c. BC, and the promotion of the

Saka in China, was recently proposed by South Korean archaeologist Kang In Uk. He based his proposal from the same finds in Majia Yuan and the provisions of the above authors (Yang Jianhua, Katheryn M. Linduff, 2013). Besides that, he also singled out in China a chain of monuments containing “Saki” gold jewellery from Gansu to the Beijing area. Kang In Uk came to a more categorical conclusion: “archaeological data proves the presence back in the 5<sup>th</sup> c. BC, long before the formation of the Han Empire, active trade contacts between North China and Central Asia. Through trade, Sakan gold items came to the territory of the Chinese kingdoms of the Zhango period. Probably, some group of Sakas even moved to China. ... jewellery and luxury gold products of the Sakas were almost universally distributed in the territory of Northern China.” (Kang In Uk, 2018, p. 410). As we see, the materials of Majia Yuan allowed Yang Jianhua and Katheryn M. Linduff to suggest small movements of people between the Tian Shan and east of Gansu in the 3<sup>rd</sup>-2<sup>nd</sup> c. BC. Kang In Uk discussed these movements as a trade relationship with the 5<sup>th</sup> c. BC, accompanied by the deliberate movement of groups of Sakas to the barbarian periphery of North China. To substantiate this position, the monuments of the Saka circle Kang In Uk referred to other most striking funerary complexes with gold products in animal style. In China, Saki products are also recognized “... found on the monuments of the mid-to-late Zhango (4<sup>th</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> c. BC) Xigoupan, Aluchaiden and other objects on the Ordos plateau ...”, which, in the opinion of Kang In Uk came to North China “not from the steppes of Siberia, but from Central Asia, where the culture of the Sakas existed.” (ibid., p. 395). According to this researcher, “The culture of the Sakas has advanced eastward to the area of modern Beijing. A typical monument here is the elite burial of Xinzhuangtou M30, which was investigated during excavations in the Lower Capital of the Kingdom of Yang” (ibid., P. 401). These conclusions, at first glance, look interesting, however, on closer examination, they do not stand up to criticism since they lack evidence and follow from the author’s free interpretations. It is important to emphasize that in the work of Kang In Uk, the Pazyryk culture of Gorny Altai and semi-mythical Dinlings in Southern Siberia also belong to the Sakas (ibid., P. 405-407). Such a broad interpretation of the list of peoples and cultures of the Saka world automatically implies a broad interpretation of the content of “Saka” art<sup>3</sup>. Such an approach makes it possible to attribute both Saki products from Kazakhstan and products from

Southern Siberia and Mongolia to Saki art, which contradicts both the realities and the above statement of the author about the penetration of this “art” from Kazakhstan through Xinjiang.

In our opinion, the ethnocultural processes in Xinjiang took place differently, and the relatively late Silk Road through Xinjiang (from the 1<sup>st</sup> c. BC) was preceded by trade relations between the northern kingdoms of China and the nomads of Southern Siberia in the 4<sup>th</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> c. BC and deliveries of Han silk to the Huns (Xiongnu) in the 2<sup>nd</sup> c. BC. To a large extent, the proposed concept is based on archaeological materials. Until the 80s archaeological data from Xinjiang territory was insufficient for any intelligible and reasonable characterization of the cultures of this region in the 1<sup>st</sup> Millennium BC. (see Litvinsky, 1984). Over the past years, in the course of large-scale excavations (especially in Tabernacle, China), representative material has been obtained for interest. A significant part of it has been published, including in monographic publications. Accordingly, the possibility of a comprehensive study of the problem of the Silk Road formation, with the involvement of archeology, is not limited to Chinese historical sources and conclusions based on them. The results of processing the available data can be formulated in the following prepositions.

According to available data, the population of Xinjiang is most well-studied in its northern part from Tianshan to Altai and was predominantly Caucasoid from the III<sup>rd</sup> Millennium BC to the 2<sup>nd</sup> c. BC. Mongoloid admixture was insignificant and mainly in the eastern part of Xinjiang (Wei Lanhai, Li Hui, Xu Wenkan, 2015). The overwhelming number of Russian, Chinese and “Western” researchers claim that starting from the III<sup>rd</sup> Millennium BC, from the territory of the countries of Central Asia and the Russian Altai, the Caucasians, including representatives of the Afanasyevsky and Andronovo cultures, penetrate Xinjiang in several waves. For the most part, their descendants lived in Xinjiang in the 9<sup>th</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> c. BC. Caucasians were also inhabited in Xinjiang, Yuezhi, and Wusun, reliably known to the Chinese from the 2<sup>nd</sup> c. BC.

The most well-studied area in the territory is the cities of Urumqi, Turfan, Hejing, and Kucha, located on the GSR. The monuments studied there relate to the culture of chahu and subiche (see Han Jianye, 2007; Shulga, 2010; Komissarov, 2011). The northern part of Xinjiang is still not well studied, but in the last 10-15 years, some significant material has been obtained. The most famous and representative are in the southern foothills of the Tien Shan, predominantly the agricultural culture of the Chahu, which existed from (10<sup>th</sup>) 9<sup>th</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> c. BC. It includes extensive burial grounds, numbering up to 250-700 graves. Of these, the

<sup>3</sup>It should be noted that the burial of Xinzhuangtou M30 is interpreted by A.A. Kovalev as close to the Pazyryks of Gorny Altai in animal style, while Kang In Uk sees Saki art in it.



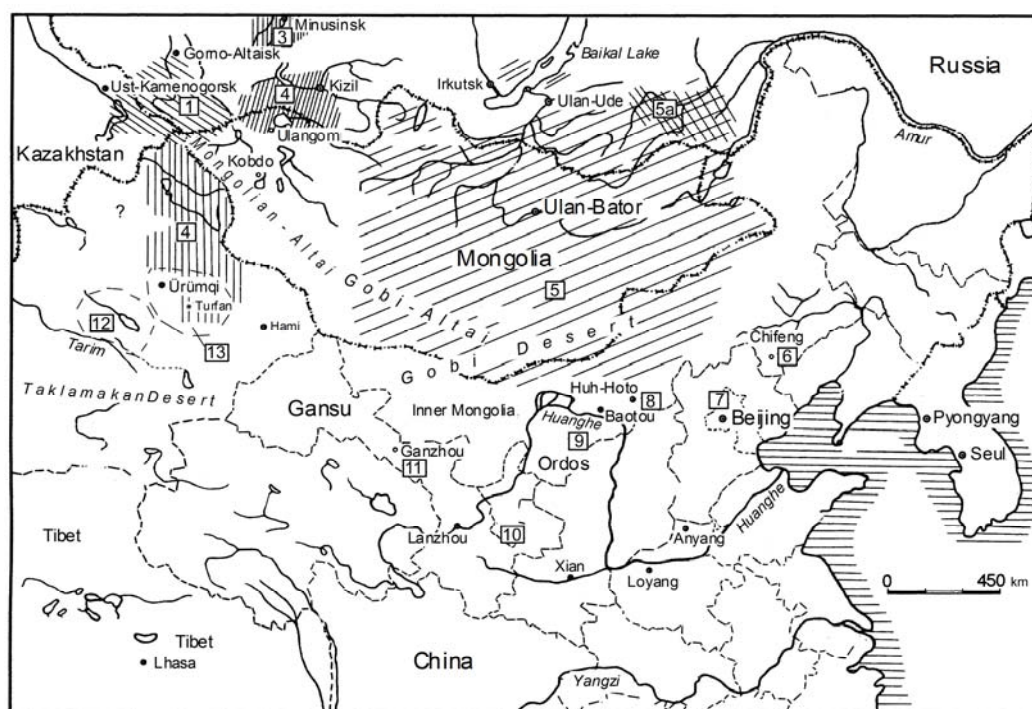
earliest Mohuchakhan of the 9<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> c. BC. was completely excavated (235 graves) (Zhang, Alifujiang, Tan, 2016) and Chauhugou-4 8<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> c. BC (248 graves) helped to understand the materials of other partially studied burial grounds and trace the evolution of the burial rite and material culture in the 9<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> c. BC (Xinjiang Institute, 1999). The burial grounds of the Xubeixi culture of the 8<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> c. BC contain fewer artifacts because they were less mobile, but, thanks to the remarkable preservation of organic matter, they are no less informative (Shulga, 2010). Both cultures (especially chahu) are characterized by a specific funeral rite and ceramic vessels not known in the neighboring territories. Much of the inventory in chahu and other cultures of Xinjiang from the 9<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> c. BC refers to the types widespread in Southern Siberia and Kazakhstan. These are details of horse equipment, belt accessories, jewellery, mirrors, some forms of knives, weapons, sharpening stones and spindles.

Attention should be paid to the facts of the long-term preservation of funerary constructions and rites in these areas of Xinjiang. The stability of cultures in Xinjiang (unlike Kazakhstan and southern Siberia) is explained by the absence of significant population migrations in the given territory and the stability of the established economic types. This feature requires a separate study, but, in any case, it indicates certain isolation of human groups living in the foothills of the Tian Shan. It is important to emphasize that, despite the territorial proximity, not a single representative burial complex from the 8<sup>th</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> c. BC has been found in Xinjiang, which relates to the cultures of North China and Gansu. Considering a large number of Tian Shan monuments investigated, it can be stated that in the Scythian time from the territory of the states of ancient China, as well as from its western and northern borders inhabited by nomads, there were no noticeable migrations to the Tian Shan. Special funeral rites and ceramics unequivocally indicate the existence in the districts of Hami, Turfan, and Hejing cities of archaeological cultures that were formed in the 9<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> c. BC, on a regional basis and remained without fundamental changes in ritual until about the middle of the 5<sup>th</sup> c. BC, and sometimes to the 3<sup>rd</sup>-2<sup>nd</sup> c. BC.

Despite the common origin and similarity of inventory, we know the culture of the population of the central part of the Eastern Tian Shan in the 8<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> c. BC was relatively isolated from the related Caucasians of Kazakhstan, South Siberia, and Mongolia. The tribes located on the periphery of

Dzungaria, of course, interacted with these peoples, but except for the Ili river and the Altai prefecture, these territories are almost not archaeologically investigated. Nevertheless, in the regions bordering Mongolia, many Mongolian-Transbaikalian, Sayan-Altai, Eurasian types of deer stones have been discovered that indicate the presence of peoples from the territory of Mongolia. There is also an example of a more distant migration from Central Kazakhstan. Comparatively recently, burial mounds from the 8<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> cc. were found at the Sayensai burial ground near the town of Turfan, close to the Tasmolian Central Kazakhstan (P. Shulga, D. Shulga, 2015). The population that left these burial mounds retained the funeral rite, but it did not accept the Tasmolian people's custom to place ceramic vessels in the grave. Simultaneously, the form and coloring of the vessels located in this region are traditionally local. The discovery of specific Arzahan type cheek-pieces in the South Przyanshany on the Mokhuchakhan burial ground and the similarity of the burial ritual to Gorny Altai indicates certain contacts of the population of this part of Xinjiang with Tuva and Gorny Altai somewhat earlier in the 9<sup>th</sup> c. BC.

Of undoubted interest is the presence in Xinjiang of burials of 5<sup>th</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> c. BC, studied in detail in the Gorny Altai (Republic of Altai, Russia) and East Kazakhstan of the Pazyryk culture proper, as well as those close to it in the burial rite and inventory. They were found in the north in the Altai Prefecture and in the Tian Shan (Turfan region) (Fig. 2.). In the Altai Prefecture in the north of Xinjiang, a significant number of burials from the IV and early 3<sup>rd</sup> c. BC were discovered, these used the Pazyryk burial rites, this fact clearly shows that they were left by the bearers of the Pazyryk culture, which penetrated Xinjiang through Ukok (Altai Republic, Russia). Evidence of their mixing with the local population is visible, resulting in numerous variations of graves with horses (Shulga, Slyusarenko, 2016; P. Shulga, D. Shulga, 2017). There was also a slight reverse penetration from Xinjiang into the Altai Mountains. Based on this data, one can speak of the existence of another Pazyryk culture center in the north of Xinjiang. One way or another, the population in the Tien-Shan, which lived in the area of the city of Turfan, left the graves in the Jiaohe Goubei burial ground, connected with this center. The two types of burials distinguished are varieties of the Pazyryk burial rite, which presumes the burial of a person-oriented to the eastern sector and a horse placed on a low relief style.



**Fig. 2.:** The layout of the Scythoid archaeological cultures in Central Asia (sensu Shulga, 2015, fig. 1). 1 – area of the Pazyryk culture (mid-to-late 6<sup>th</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> c. BC); 2 – territory, presumably settled by tribes close Pazyryk Culture in the 5<sup>th</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> c. BC; 3 – Tagar Culture; 4 – Uyuk-Sagly culture (mid-to-late 6<sup>th</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> c. BC); 5 – main area of Slab Grave culture; 5a – Dvortovskya Culture (7<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> c. BC); 6-11 – places of greatest concentration of monuments of the Scythoid archaeological cultures of "barbarians" of the 9<sup>th</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> c. BC in China: 6 – Upper Xiajiadian culture (about 9<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> c. BC); 7 – Yuhuangmiao Culture (7<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> c. BC); 8 – Maojinggou Culture (the late 6<sup>th</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> c. BC); 9 – Taohongbala Culture (6<sup>th</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> c. BC); 10 – Yanglan Culture (6<sup>th</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> c. BC); 11 – Shajing Culture (6<sup>th</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> c. BC); 12 – Chauhu Culture; 13 – Xubeixi Culture.

**2. ábra:** Közép-Ázsia szkíta jellegű kultúráinak területi elhelyezkedése (Shulga 2015. fig. 1. nyomán)

The equipment of many horses in Jiaohe included horn harness sets similar to those found in Altai (Shulga, 2010, fig. 88, 89), but the features of the burial rite, ceramics, and equipment leave no doubt about the local character of these monuments. Other identical burial grounds have yet to be found, but many of the features of the burial rite, tools, clothing, and art in other cultures in Tien Shan are very close to Pazyryks (Polosmak, 1989; Polosmak, Barkova, 2005). These examples show the presence of contacts between the cultures of Xinjiang and the related populations of Kazakhstan and Sayano-Altai.

There were numerous burials investigated in the Tian Shan hillock and in the southern foothills of the Altai in Xinjiang, which contain horse and warrior equipment, weapons, and many categories of other equipment and decorations from the 9<sup>th</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> c. BC. These sites were close or identical to the synchronously existing complexes of artifacts from the cultures of Kazakhstan and Sayano-Altai. At the same time, the burial rite and ceramic vessels unequivocally demonstrate the originality of local cultures of Xinjiang, which show a long period of independent development.

In the funerary monuments of the 9<sup>th</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> c. BC in Xinjiang, not a single representative complex from ancient China or the cultures of "barbarians" surrounding it from the north and west has yet been found. There is not even evidence of the burials of the Shajing culture that existed at this time in Gansu, which is well identified by the burial rites and inventory. The Mongoloid population of Gansu and more eastern territories did not penetrate the oases of Xinjiang in any appreciable quantity. There are also no data on notable migrations of the Caucasoid population from Xinjiang, China. The only exception is the animal style finds from Majia Yuan. However, they are not identical to Sakas artifacts and are only found in burials performed according to local rites and with "local" inventory, including Chinese items. It follows that before the Huns (Xiongnu) advanced to Xinjiang in the first half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> c. BC (after the Yuezhi went to the west), and the subsequent penetration of the Han from the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> c. BC., Xinjiang culture had little or no contact with not only the peoples of North China but also the adjacent Gansu corridor



from the east<sup>4</sup>. Meanwhile, there are numerous and reliable sources of archaeological data on the existence of active cultural and trade relations between Ancient China and Southern Siberia (including Gorny Altai) directly from North China through Mongolia. Branches diverged from Mongolia to the Gorny Altai, Tuva, and the Minusinsk Basin and Transbaikalia. It is important to note that this path roughly corresponds to the "Uigur" path, rightly called the "old road of Central Asian nomads" (E.I. Lubo-Lesnichenko, 1994, p. 262) (**Fig. 1.**). Along this path, the Minusinsk Basin population, Transbaikalia and Mongolia, contacted North China from the Late Bronze Age (Karasuk bronzes). There is every reason to talk about the existence in the I<sup>st</sup> Millennium BC between Baikal and Ordos of the "eastern" historical and cultural community of the Mongoloids, characterized by interpenetration of cultures in the meridional direction, the similarity of the burial rite and inventory (Shulga, 2015, p. 27-28). The Caucasoid tribes of the Minusinsk Basin were closely associated with this community. There was a meridional ("Uigur") trade route (China - South Siberia), based on close ties that existed from the late Bronze Age (12<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> c. BC). Movement on it sharply intensified in the 4<sup>th</sup> c. BC, and flourished at the end of 4<sup>th</sup> - beginning of 3<sup>rd</sup> c. BC. It followed from the region of the Ordos, which was then in the sphere of interest and influence of the states of Qin, Zhao, and Yang, and then through Mongolia - to the west to the Altai Mountains and the Upper Priobye, and the north-west - to the Minusinsk depression. It can be assumed that the main amount of silk in the 4<sup>th</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> c. BC came to Central Asia and Xinjiang and further to the west along the "Uyghur" route from North China through Mongolia to the Altai Mountains.

### Conclusion

According to the results of this research, it can be concluded that the popular theory in Russian and foreign literature on the formation and even functioning of the GSR, beginning from the III-II thousand BC, or from the 6<sup>th</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> c. BC can no longer be considered reasonable.

First, the analysis of previously known and new historical, anthropological and archaeological data allows us to speak with a high degree of certainty

about the absence of up to the 3<sup>rd</sup>-2<sup>nd</sup> c. BC of any actual evidence of the existence of trade (exchange) links between the predominantly Caucasoid cultures in Xinjiang and the Mongoloids of the Gansu corridor. There is no evidence of trade with the more eastern territories, including farmers of ancient China and the "barbarians." As a result, the concept of Lubo-Lesnichenko and many other researchers on the functioning of various trade routes through Xinjiang in the 6<sup>th</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> c. BC can no longer be supported.

Secondly, it is possible to state with certainty the existence of two meridional trade routes between agricultural civilizations in the south (Western Asia and China) and the northern nomads of Siberia and Mongolia. The first (western) route from Western Asia through the Kazakh steppes to Gorny Altai (Altai Republic, Russia), the Upper Ob, and the Southern Urals was formed in the 6<sup>th</sup> c. BC the formation of the Achaemenid Empire and died away at the beginning of the 3<sup>rd</sup> c. BC after the eastern march of Alexander the Great. The second meridional route from North China to Southern Siberia passed through Mongolia along the route formed in the Late Bronze Age.

Thirdly, the silk route through Xinjiang to the west from China with the direct participation of the Chinese begins to function only in the 1<sup>st</sup> c. BC when the Han, at high cost, finally succeeded in establishing control over this territory.

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<sup>4</sup>At the same time, we cannot completely deny the probability of existence in the IV – III c. BC limited exchange relations through the eastward Yuezhi. However, according to some studies, Yuezhi did not inhabit the Gansu corridor, and did not have direct contact with the Qin State. Their clashes and contacts with the Huns (Xiongnu) took place in areas north and north-west of Gansu.)

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