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Genesis of the Silk Road and Its Northern Directions

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Abstract. This article argues that the conclusions in the prevailing modern scientific literature on the formation of the Great Silk Road 3rd-2nd millennium BC or from the 4th-3rd centuries BC cannot be considered reasonable in light of available scientific and archival evidence. Until the 3rd-2nd centuries 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, but 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. Significant migrations of the population from Xinjiang to China and in the opposite direction between the third and the first half of the 1st millennium BC according to the available archaeological records has not been observed.

The Silk Road from China through Xinjiang to the west with the direct involvement of the Chinese, only begins to function in the 1st century 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 4th and 3rd centuries BC and the delivery of the gifts to the Huns from the Han Dynasty in the 2nd century BC. This enabled silk and varnish products to penetrate Southern Siberia, Central Asia and then back into Xinjiang.

Keywords: the Silk Road, Xinjiang, Southern Siberia, early nomads, Han, Scythians, Pazyryk culture, Saka.

Research area: history and archaeology

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О становлении Шелкового пути и его северных направлениях

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Аннотация. Авторы приходят к заключению, что широко распространённые в русскоязычной и зарубежной научной литературе мнения о формировании Великого Шёлкового пути, начиная с III–II тыс. до н. э., или с VI–III вв. до н. э., нельзя считать обоснованными. До III–II вв. до н. э. преимущественно европеоидное население Синьцзяна контактировало на западных и северных границах с родственными культурами Казахстана и Саяно-Алтая, но не имело сколько-нибудь заметных и документированных торговых (обменных) связей с расположенными к востоку монголоидами Ганьсуйского коридора, земледельцами Древнего Китая и кочевниками Северного Китая. Значительных миграций населения из Синьцзяна в Китай и в обратном направлении в III – первой половине I тыс. до н. э. по археологическим материалам не наблюдается.

Собственно Шёлковый путь из Китая через Синьцзян на запад при непосредственном участии китайцев начинает функционировать только в I в. до н. э., когда империи Хань ценой больших усилий удаётся оттеснить хунну из Синьцзяна и установить контроль над данной территорией. Этим событиям предшествовали активные торговые отношения северных царств Китая с кочевниками Южной Сибири в IV–III вв. до н. э. и поставки хуннам «даров» из Хань во II в. до н. э., посредством которых шёлк и лаковые изделия проникали в Южную Сибирь, Среднюю Азию и кружным путём в Синьцзян.

Ключевые слова: Великий Шёлковый путь, Синьцзян, Южная Сибирь, ранние кочевники, империя Хань, скифоидные культуры, пазырыкская культура, саки.

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Statement of the problem and the purpose of the article

A huge number of publications is devoted to the issues of the Great Silk Road (GSR) functioning, 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, most researchers as a rule limit themselves to stating the previously known facts and follow the concepts of E. I. Lubo-Lesnichenko, supplemented by the research of Kuzmina on the III–II millennium 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 this new data is that it concerns the period of the 9th–3rd centuries BC, immediately preceding the actual start of the operation of the GSR through Xinjiang. Foreign researchers (including the Chinese) are more actively attracted by the archaeological materials and the results of natural research, which focus on the period of the 1st–14th centuries BC and before.

However, available data has revealed that in the 2nd century BC Xinjiang was dissected by nomads and caravans in all directions, so that a trade situation existed before the GSR but on a smaller, more spasmodic scale. From this standpoint, it seems to many that before the route through Xinjiang existed (it is generally agreed that this was the shortest way from the West to Ancient China in the 2nd century 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 Xinjiang¹.

In addition, more and more research has now appeared in China (including, anthropological and genetic studies) that has revealed

¹ 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 Høisæter, 2017). However, the author confined himself to archaeological materials of only two areas near the Bagrashkol Lake and the Keriya River. This data is insufficient for building a cogent concept).

the penetration of the Mongoloid population in the Bronze Age into the Hami area and further to the west, as well as a significant proportion of Mongoloid admixture on the monuments of eastern Xinjiang (Wei Lanhai, Li Hui, Xu Wenkan, 2015). This research accurately describes the ongoing movement of Mongoloids in Xinjiang from the east to the west. It is not surprising that the overwhelming majority of earlier researchers of the GSR were unaware of these events which took place in 3rd–2nd 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 typical for Mongolia (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 3rd–1st 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–II millennium B.C., seems more acceptable. These researchers suggest that the actual GSR only begins to function in the manner described in the earlier research in the 1st century 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 3rd – 1st 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 with regular silk trade from China through Xinjiang cannot be said to have been formed earlier than the 1st century BC. Recent archaeological data from Xinjiang is of particular importance, here a significant number of Scythian tombs have been investigated and the data they contained has only just 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 Ji-anye, 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 which 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 1st millennium BC and also considers controversial viewpoints on this issue from Russian and foreign researchers from Europe, 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 «lazarite» and «jade» routes from the second 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 1st millennium BC.

In the Russian literature, the most comprehensive rationale for the emergence of the GSR from the 3rd-2nd 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 that went from China and Western Asia through Xinjiang in the northern direction to Southern Siberia. As demonstrated by the available scientific 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 is

recited on the early formation of the GSR, the spread of silk to the west in the first half of the first millennium BC, the existence in China of the «western meridional» trade route and information about the findings of Chinese products of the 4th-3rd c. BC beyond it. Sometimes China's trade relations with Southern Siberia in the 4th-3rd centuries BC are mentioned along the «Kyrgyz» and «Uigur» ways. However, as yet there is no definitive research on their functioning in the 1st 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; and others).

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, etc.), as well as possible impacts on the migrations of Europeans moving across Xinjiang from west to east in 3rd-2nd millennium BC (Kuzmina, 2010, p. 69, 87). Multidirectional «lazarite» and «jade» paths were not interconnected, and the assumption of their merging in the middle of the 5th century 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 time 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 «lazarite» paths going westward by the Yuezhi (Mamadazimov, 2014, p. 12). In our opinion, the Yuezhi, after successive defeats by the Huns, in the first half of the 2nd 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 in fact.

We cannot agree with a proposition based on available material concerning the 3rd-2nd millennium BC that is expounded by E. E. Kuz-

mina, 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 artefacts 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 3rd-2nd millennium BC allows to push back the time of formation of the eastern route to antiquity» (ibid, p. 106).

It should be noted that the viewpoint on the assignment of the initial stage of the Silk Road to the Bronze Age in different variations was accepted by most «Western» researchers (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 wide world long before the famous Silk Road was created. In the north and northwest, China maintained contact with nomadic tribes which contributed to the transfer of bronze and iron metallurgy. 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)².

Indeed, the data of anthropology, genetics and archeology in Xinjiang unequivocally indicate the proximity of a part of the Bronze Age monuments studied there to the cultures of Central Asia (primarily Kazakhstan) and Western Siberia. This is quite natural, since this territory was inhabited by Caucasians who came from the west. At that time, however, there were no noticeable connections with the

cultures of ancient China or the Gansu corridor. There are only individual items from China, usually found outside the complexes. In other words, Caucasians of Xinjiang in the 3rd-2nd millennium BC in one way or another maintained connections with related cultures in the western and northern directions. A similar situation persisted until the 3rd-2nd centuries 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 3rd century BC relations with China had not been established, including the closest to the east Shajing culture in Gansu (Shulga, 2010, pp. 108–110). There were infiltrations in the territory of Xinjiang open to the west and north (Shulga, Shulga, 2015) and cultural interaction existed (Polosmak, 1989; Shulga, 2010; others), however these are separate and unconnected events and it would be erroneous to call these processes the beginning of the formation of the Silk trade route.

The issue of the possibility of the Silk Road functioning from the 2nd 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 1st century, 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 4th century BC from China to Southern Siberia through Gansu and Xinjiang, as well as from Western Asia to Southern Siberia through Turpan in the 6th-4th c. BC. This concept is based on the thesis of the existence of a «western meridional» trade route in China (Fig. 1). In our opinion, this route linked the southeast of China with Gansu and Xinjiang

² Notice that the northern direction is also mentioned, but nevertheless, 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.

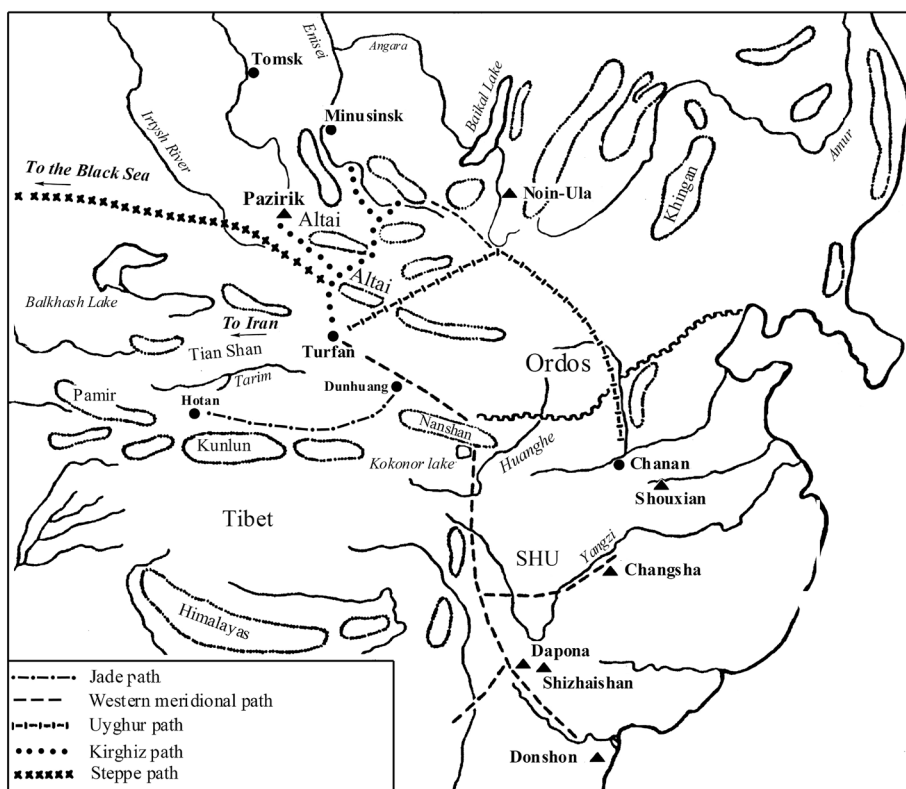


Figure 1. Map of E. I. Lubo-Lesnichenko
The proposed scheme of trade routes of the kingdoms of ancient China in the early Iron Age and the Middle Ages (sensu E. I. Lubo-Lesnichenko, fig. 116). ЦКР – Central China Plain

(to Turfan). Further, according to E.I. Lubo-Lesnichenko, from Turfan in the 4th c. BC along the «Kyrgyz» road, the «roads» to the north went to the Minusinsk Hollow 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 Southern Siberia with the ancient civilizations of Western Asia was at that time the path leading from Achaemenid Iran through the north of Eastern Turkestan to Tuva, Altai and the Minusinsk Hollow. Its northern part from Turfan is called the «Kyrgyz» way. The heyday of trade on this path refers to the 6th-4th 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 embroider-

ies, Shu canvas and Chu mirrors penetrated into Southern Siberia from the state of Chu. An assumption was made about the connection of the mentioned «Kyrgyz» path with the «steppe» path described by Herodot (Lubo-Lesnichenko, 1989, p. 8) (Fig. 1).

Therefore, E.I. Lubo-Lesnichenko believed that even before the 6th c. BC the trade route from Iran to Southern Siberia functioned through Turfan, which reached its expansion in the 6th-4th centuries BC (Fig. 1). According to the conclusions of E. I. Lubo-Lesnichenko this way in the 4th 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 the «Kyrgyz» path (Fig. 1). In fact, conforming to the concept of E. I. Lubo-Lesnichenko, in the 4 century 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 Turfan. 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 Turfan to Altai, according to E. I. Lubo-Lesnichenko, existed, at least from the 7th c. BC, since 6th c. BC it experienced its heyday. However, the author did not make a conclusion about the addition of an extensive route of the GSR already existing in the 4th c. BC, because he clearly saw the inconsistency. The logic of E. I. Lubo-Lesnichenko's view on the directions of the GSR and its branches is quite simple and understandable: 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 5th – early 3rd c. BC. Obviously, these goods came to the north along some paths, which according to E. I. Lubo-Lesnichenko most likely meant there were already some known medieval routes through Xinjiang. This last assumption, in our opinion, is the fatal flaw of his arguments, it is now seen as pure conjecture with no factual support. Note that in the above conclusions of E. I. Lubo-Lesnichenko 6th-4th 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 Majia Yuan, is of undoubted interest regarding the likelihood of real contacts in the Tian Shan area assuming this northern route of the GSR was established in the 3rd-2nd centuries 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» was found (Institute of Archeology ..., 2014; others). These experts with some justification have suggested that they are close in style and production technology to products from the documented Issyk mound in south-east Kazakhstan

(Yang Jianhua, Katheryn M. Linduff, 2013, p. 74). It was discovered that a woman from 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 of 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. In connection with the later findings in the Majia Yuan, dated around the 3rd-2nd 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 the Majia Yuan about the possible penetration of certain groups of people in the 3rd-2nd c. BC from the Tian Shan to the borders of the state of Qin, it is quite an acceptable deduction.

Expanded rationale for the addition of the Silk Road from the 5th c. BC, and the promotion of the Saka in China was recently proposed by South Korean archaeologist Kang In Uk. He based his proposal on the same findings in the Majia Yuan and the provisions of the above authors (Yang Jianhua, Katheryn M. Linduff, 2013). Aside from that, he additionally singled out in China a chain of monuments which contained «Saki» gold jewelry from Gansu to the Beijing area. Kang In Uk came to a more categorical conclusion: «... archaeological data proves the presence back in the 5th c. BC, long before the formation of the Han Empire, of active trade contacts between Northern China

and Central Asia. Through trade, Saka gold items came to the territory of the Chinese kingdoms of the Zhangou period. Probably, some group of Sakas even moved to China. ... jewelry 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 the Majia Yuan allowed Yang Jianhua and Katheryn M. Linduff to suggest small movements of people between the Tian Shan and the east of Gansu in the 3rd-2nd c. BC. Kang In Uk discussed these movements as a trade relationship in the 5th c. BC, accompanied by the deliberate movement of groups of Sakas to the barbarian periphery of Northern China. To substantiate this position, Kang In Uk referred other most striking funerary complexes with gold products in animal style to the monuments of the Saka circle. In China, Saka products are also recognized as «... found on the monuments of the mid-to-late Zhangou (4th – 3rd c. BC) Xigoupan, Aluchaiden and other objects on the Ordos plateau ...», which, in the opinion of Kang In Uk came to Northern 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, seem quite interesting, however, with 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 Dinklins 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» art³. Such an approach makes it possible to attribute both Saka products from Kazakhstan and products

from Southern Siberia and Mongolia to Saka 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 1st century BC) was preceded by trade relations between the northern kingdoms of China and the nomads of Southern Siberia in the 4th-3rd centuries BC and deliveries of Han silk to the Huns in the 2nd c. BC. To a large extent, the proposed concept is based on archaeological materials. Until the 80s archaeological data from Xinjiang territory was clearly insufficient for any intelligible and reasonable characterization of the cultures of this region in the I 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 the period we are interested in. A significant part of it has been published, including 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 as follows.

According to the available data, the population of Xinjiang, first of all is most well-studied in its northern part from the Tian Shan to Altai and was predominantly Caucasoid from the 3rd millennium BC to the 2nd 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 3rd 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 into Xinjiang in several waves. For the most part, their descendants lived in Xinjiang in the 9th-3rd centuries BC. Caucasians also inhabited Xinjiang, Yuezhi and Wusun, reliably known to the Chinese from the 2nd century BC.

³ 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.

The most well studied area in the territory are the cities of Urumqi, Turfan, Hejing and Kucha, located on the GSR. The monuments studied there relate to the culture of Chauhu 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 which is predominantly the agricultural culture of the Chauhu, which existed from (10th) 9th to 6th-5th centuries BC. It includes large burial grounds up to 250–700 graves. Among them, the earliest Mohuchakhan of the 9th-8th c. BC. was completely excavated (235 graves) (Zhang, Alifujiang, Tan, 2016) and Chauhugou-4 8th-6th c. BC (248 graves), which helped to understand the materials of other partially studied burial grounds, as well as to trace the evolution of the burial rite and material culture in the 9th-6th c. BC (Xinjiang Institute, 1999). The burial grounds of the Xubeixi culture of the 8th-5th centuries BC contain fewer artefacts because they were less mobile, but, thanks to the remarkable preservation of organic matter, they are no less informative (Shulga, 2010). Both cultures (especially Chauhu) are characterized by a specific funeral rite and ceramic vessels not known in the neighboring territories. Much of the inventory in Chauhu and other cultures of Xinjiang from the 9th – 5th centuries BC refers to the types widespread in Southern Siberia and Kazakhstan. These are details of horse equipment, belt accessories, jewelry, mirrors, some forms of knives, weapons, sharpening stones and spindles.

Attention should be paid to the facts of 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 a 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 buri-

al complex from the 8th – 4th c. BC has been found in Xinjiang which relates to the cultures of Northern China and Gansu. Considering the large number of the 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 9th-8th c. BC on a local basis and remained without fundamental changes in rituals until about the middle of the 5th century. BC, and sometimes to the 3d-2nd century 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 8th– 6th century BC was relatively isolated from the related Caucasians of Kazakhstan, Southern Siberia and Mongolia. The tribes located on the periphery of Dzungaria, of course, interacted with these peoples, but with the exception of the Ili river and the Altai prefecture, these territories are almost not archaeologically investigated. Nevertheless, in the regions bordering with Mongolia, a significant number of Mongolian-Transbaikal, Sayan-Altai, and Eurasian types of deer stones have been discovered that clearly indicate the presence of peoples from the territory of Mongolia. There is also an example of a more distant migration from Central Kazakhstan. Quite recently, burial mounds from the 8th-7th centuries BC were found at the Sayensai burial ground near the town of Turfan, close to 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 customs of the Tasmoli people to place ceramic vessels in the grave. At the same time the form and coloring of the vessels located in this region is traditionally local. The discovery of specific Arzahan type cheek-pieces in the Southern 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

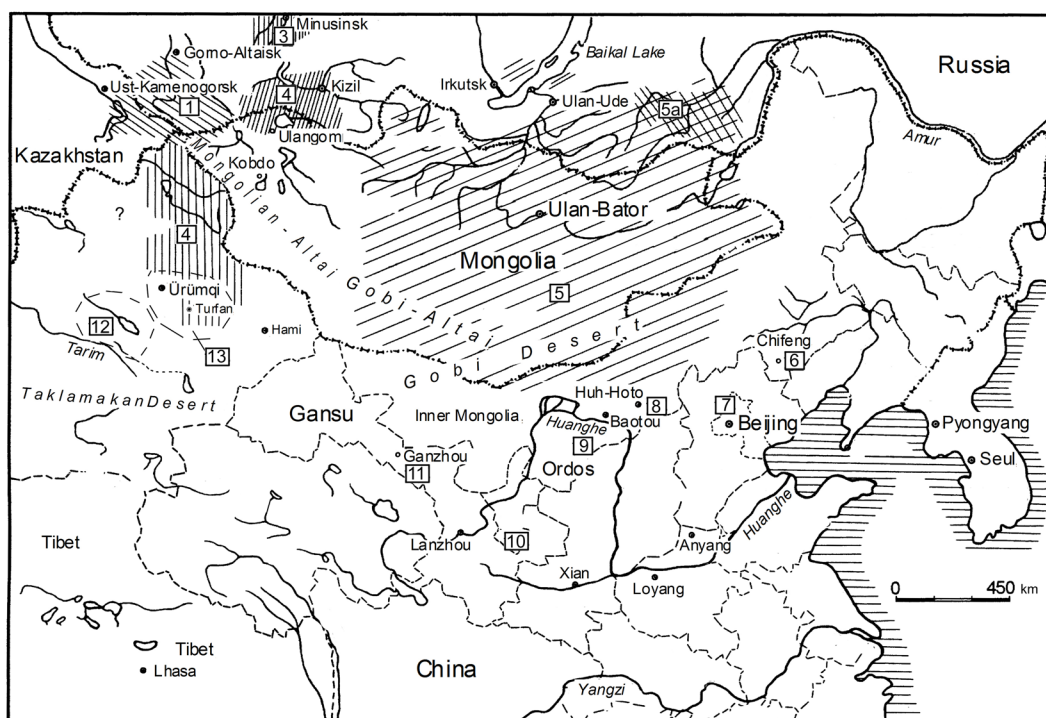


Figure 2. Cultures map. The layout of the Scythoid archaeological cultures in Central Asia (sensu Shulga, 2015, fig. 1). 1 – area of the Pazyryk culture (mid-to-late VI–III c. BC); 2 – territory, presumably settled by tribes close Pazyryk Culture in the V–III c. BC; 3 – Tagar Culture; 4 – Uyük-Sagly culture (mid-to-late VI–III c. BC); 5 – main area of Slab Grave culture; 5a – Dvortovskya Culture (VII–VI c. BC); 6–11 – places of greatest concentration of monuments of the Scythoid archaeological cultures of «barbarians» of the IX–III c. BC in China: 6 – Upper Xiajiadian culture (about IX–VII c. BC); 7 – Yuhuangmiao Culture (VII–VI c. BC); 8 – Maojinggou Culture (the late VI–III c. BC); 9 – Taohongbala Culture (VI–III c. BC); 10 – Yanglan Culture (VI–III c. BC); 11 – Shajing Culture (VI–IV c. BC); 12 – Chauhu Culture; 13 – Xubeixi Culture.

Tuva and Gorny Altai somewhat earlier in the 9th c. BC.

Of undoubted interest is the presence in Xinjiang of burials of 5th–3rd c. BC, studied in detail in Gorny Altai (Republic of Altai, Russia) and Eastern Kazakhstan of the Pazyryk culture, 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 4th and early 3rd centuries BC were discovered, which used the Pazyryk burial rites. This fact clearly shows that they were left by the bearers of the Pazyryk culture, which penetrated into Xinjiang through Ukok (Altai Republic, Russia). Evi-

dence 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. On the basis of 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, and which left the graves in the Jiaohe Goubei burial ground, was connected with this center. Two types of burials distinguished there are in fact varieties of the Pazyryk burial rite, which presumes the burial of a person oriented to the eastern sector together with a horse placed on a low relief stipe. The equipment of many hors-

es 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 the Tien Shan are very close to Pazyryks (Polosmak, 1989; Polosmak, Barkova, 2005). All 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 9th-3rd centuries BC. These sites were close, or identical to the synchronously existing complexes of artefacts 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 9th-3rd centuries BC in Xinjiang, not a single representative complex from ancient China or from 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 are well identified by the burial rites and inventory. Obviously, the Mongoloid population of Gansu and more eastern territories in this time did not penetrate into 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 Saka artifacts and are only found in burials performed according to local rites and with «local» inventory, including Chinese items. From all this it follows that before the Huns advanced to Xinjiang in the first half of the 2nd century BC (after the Yuezhi went to the west), and the subsequent penetration of the Han from

the end of the 2nd c. BC., Xinjiang culture had little or no contact with not only the peoples of Northern China, but also the adjacent Gansu corridor from the east⁴. 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 Northern China through Mongolia. Branches diverged from Mongolia to the Gorny Altai, Tuva and the Minusinsk Hollow and Transbaikalia. It is noteworthy 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 population of the Minusinsk Basin, Transbaikalia and Mongolia contacted Northern China from the Late Bronze Age (Karasuk bronzes). There is every reason to talk about the existence in the 1st 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, 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 (12–10 centuries. BC). Movement on it sharply intensified in the 4th century BC, and flourished at the end of 4th – beginning of 3rd century BC. It followed from the region of 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 Priorye, and to the north-west – to the Minusinsk depression. It can be assumed that the main amount of silk in the 4th-3rd centuries BC came to Central Asia and Xinjiang and further to the west along the «Uygur» route from Northern China through Mongolia to the Altai Mountains.

⁴ At the same time, we cannot completely deny the probability of existence in the 4th – 3rd c. BC of 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 took place in areas north and north-west of Gansu.)

Conclusion

According to the results of this research, it can be concluded that the widespread theory in Russian and foreign scientific literature on the formation and even functioning of the GSR, beginning from the 3rd-2nd millennium BC, or from the 6th-3rd centuries 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 3rd-2nd centuries 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 6th-3rd centuries BC can no longer be supported.

Secondly, it is possible to state with certainty about the existence of two meridional trade routes between agricultural civilizations located 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 6th century BC with the formation of the Achaemenid Empire, and dies away at the beginning of the 3rd c. BC after the eastern march of Alexander the Great. The second meridional route from Northern China to Southern Siberia passed through Mongolia along the route that was 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 1st century BC when the Han, at great cost, finally succeeded in establishing control over this territory.

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