

Federal State Budgetary Educational Institution of Higher Education
RUSSIAN ACADEMY OF THE NATIONAL ECONOMY AND PUBLIC
ADMINISTRATION UNDER THE PRESIDENT OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION
Siberian Institute of Management

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**PREREQUISITES OF THE GRAND SILK ROAD AND ITS
FUNCTIONING IN THE CONTEXT OF THE CHINA-NOMAD-
MEDITERRANEAN TRIAD**

STRUCTURAL ABSTRACT

of the thesis for a degree of doctor of historical sciences

Specialty 07.00.03 – General History
(History of civilization, countries, peoples, regions)

Novosibirsk 2022

The relevance of research. Being a network of routes in Eurasia the Great Silk Road (GSL) played a huge role in the socio-political and ethno cultural development of the region. This is not just about the Far Eastern fabrics that were made in the Mediterranean or the Roman gold that was distributed in the Yellow Basin. The GSL influence was noticeable in religious life (Nestorianism, Manichaeism, Buddhism, etc.), art (antique images in East Asia), political genesis (statehood development in the Western Province, northern China and adjacent regions), and other spheres. All the above applies to a number of territories that are now part of the Russian Federation and other countries of the former Soviet Union.

In Russian-speaking science there is an interest in the Great Silk Road phenomenon, especially in the last two decades. A number of issues (the development of Nestorianism in Central and East Asia, narrative sources about the Silk Road interpretation in different languages, Chinese imports from nomads in South Siberia, etc.) are well studied in articles and monographs. In this case, a lot of materials (for example, East Roman coins in China), alas, remain outside the scope of research. In addition, in post-Soviet historical science a number of not fully evidential concepts, assumptions and hypotheses, starting from GSR more ancient (almost up to the advanced bronze era) build idea, ending with « Mark Crassus` legionaries in China») are preserved and reproduced. By involving, systematization and analysis of new sources (first of all, epigraphic, archaeological and narrative) in this dissertation study the existing understanding of the Great Silk Road is expanded and corrected significantly. The author evidently presents the GSR addition and development as a result of joint activity of three «worlds»: Greco-Romanesque, Chinese and nomadic, focusing on those points that were practically not studied in Russian-language science until now.

In addition to the above, the Great Silk Road study is also relevant in the light of the current geopolitical situation, when the People's Republic of China proclaims the initiative «One Belt - One Way». China's moves in the international arena adequate understanding is possible only if there is in-depth research on the historical GSR.

The **research object** is the Silk Road as an ethno cultural and socio-political phenomenon.

The **research subject** is related to the GSR formation and development ethno cultural and socio-political processes in VI century BC. - XIV century CE., reconstructed on the basis of epigraphic and written sources, funeral rites, clothing complex.

The research **goal** is to give an analysis of the driving forces involved in the GSR formation and development on the basis of narrative, archeological and epigraphic materials. The achievement of the indicated goal requires solving several **research objectives**:

1. To provide the source base analysis and to characterize its features.
2. To identify the topic scientific development degree based on the literature analysis.
3. To systematize the archaeological material of Northern China population Scythian-like cultures.
4. To reconstruct the main features of Northern China population economic complex and social organization in the early Iron Age and Hunno-Sarmatian era.
5. To investigate the relationship between the archaeological cultures of the early nomads and the peoples (primarily Xiongnu, Xianbi¹ and Yuezhi) that influenced the GSR formation (through the ancient and medieval states establishment in Central Asia and North China).
6. To analyze objects of Greco-Romance origin in China (art, coins), including in the context of their orientalizing.
7. To Embrace the «external» religions spread peculiarities in China (Manichaeism, Nestorian Christianity).
8. To consider the parallels in the paradigms of foreign policy relations with nomads among the Chinese and Roma.²

Geographically the work covers the territory of the modern Ningxia-Hui Autonomous Region, the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, Gansu and Shaanxi

¹ *Xianbi* is acient way of reading, modern is Xianbei.

² Here and further the names «Roman», «East-Roman» and «Byzantine» are used as synonyms.

Provinces. They are determined by the distribution area and the degree of study first of the archaeological sites of the Maoqingou, Yanglang and Shajing cultures, and then by location of the early medieval states whose dynasties were of nomadic (primarily Xianbei) origin (primarily Tuoba-Wei and Northern Zhou). Based on the archaeological data analysis it is clear that Xinjiang, on the one hand, and the north-east of China (Dongbei) on the other, was markedly different from the region under study both during the formation of the preconditions for the GSR unification (the end of the VI-II c. BC) and in the era of its direct functioning. Xinjiang was more related to the Central Asian Cultural Circle, and Dongbei was relatively uninvolved in the GSR activity. Thus, in this study North China is the territory whose heritage marks the links of Central Asia and the Far East with the Mediterranean (i.e. the range of Greek, Roman and Roman cultures). Without being able to look at the vast amount of material on the Silk Road in one work (such a work would take many volumes³) we focus on one region demonstrating the GSR development as a whole through its history.

Chronologically the work covers two periods. On the one hand, it is the time of Scythian cultures existence of the VI-III centuries BC, represented by Pazyryk, Uyk-Saghlyk, Tagar, Maoqingou, Yanglang, Shajing cultures as well as tile graves cultures (TGC) and others (Figure 1) in Eurasia steppe belt eastern part. The beginning of this period in the territory from the Black Sea to Tuva and the eastern part of Xinjiang falls approximately into the second part of the VI century BC, when the early Scythian appearance cultures completely faded away there. In the relatively isolated eastern part of the Scythian-like world from Transbaikalia to Huanghe, the ethno cultural processes were not so abrupt, but Yanglang, Maoqingou, and probably Shajing cultures also appeared at the end of the VI century BC. The cultures of Xinjiang and Sayan-Altai existed in sync in the VI-III centuries BC judging from the materials given in the dissertation, this period was

³ Great Silk Road are widespread geographically, one of the examples is find in Bulgaria (Stara Zagora) in the tomb of a cataphract of the I-II centuries Han style sword with jade inserts (For further details, see: *Gontier É., Kostov R. I., Strack E. A Han-dated 'hydra'-type nephrite scabbard slide found in Chatalka (Bulgaria): the earliest and most distant example of Chinese nephrite distribution in Europe // Arkéolog, 2014. Vol. 65/4. Pp. 5-12.*).

the time when the Great Silk Road formation prerequisites were actively formed (intensive political and economic development of nomads, wars for unification in China, Hellenes gradual movement to the east during colonization and wars with Persians). On the other hand, the GSR functioning in the late antiquity and early Middle Ages is considered⁴, i.e. the materials of II c. BC. - VIII centuries are analyzed. Finally, in order to trace the processes started in the early Iron Age consequences the author attracts the «high Asian Middle Ages» events (XI-XIV centuries.).

Research source base. In the process of analysis, archaeological data interpretation and systems of management world view reconstruction the following data were widely involved:

1) Archaeological materials published in articles and monographs devoted to various aspects of the Central Asia and adjacent territories population culture study;

2) Museum artifacts collections recorded by the author in the People's Republic of China (Provincial Museums of Gansu, Shaanxi, Museum of Material Culture of XUAR, Museums of Beijing, Mausoleum complex of the First Emperor in Xi'an), and in Russian museums (State Hermitage, Museum of History and Culture of the Peoples of Siberia and the Far East, Museum of Archaeology of the Altai State University);

3) Written testimonies of ancient authors (Sima Qian («Historical Notes»), Herodotus («History»), Strabo («Geography»), Jia Yi⁵ (presumably «Xin Shu», as well as various reports, primarily to Emperor Wendi who ruled in 180- 157 years BC), Zhuge Liang («The Vineyard of the General»⁶), Fan Ye («The History of the Later Han Dynasty»), Chen Shou («The Records of the Three Kingdoms»), Ban Gu («The History of the Han Dynasty»), Wei Shou («The Book of Wei», refers to the Tuoba-Wei (so-called Northern Wei) dynasty which ruled in

⁴ With an emphasis on the least studied topics, see more in chapter 1.4. of this study.

⁵ His instructions on relations with «barbarians» are discussed in detail in section 3.6.

⁶ The treatise of this author «The Vineyard of the General» was translated by the author personally and is described in more detail in the second chapter.

386-53 and in a fragmented state – up to 550-ies.), Yu Huan («Wei Shu», also referred to as Tuoba-Wei), Fang Xuanling («The Book of Jin», refers to the Jin dynasty that ruled in 265–420), Yao Sylian («The Book of Liang», means Southern Liang ruled in 557–589.), Liu Xu («Early History of Tang»), Ouyang Xiu («New History of Tang»), Toktoghlan («Song Dynasty Chronicle»), Ma Duanlin (Encyclopedia «Wenxian Tongkao», etc.), Zhao Rukuo («Description of the alien») and others.);

4) Religious-philosophical sources of ancient Iran, India (Avesta, Rigveda, Nestorian and Manichean texts);

5) Ethnographic materials on the culture of nomadic herders in Central Asia;

6) Numismatic materials of the Unified (during the period of domination) and the Eastern Roman Empire found in China;

7) Epigraphic sources (mainly Early Medieval Chinese epitaphs, translated, incl., from Classical Chinese, Wenyan by D.P. Shulga).

Theoretical and methodological foundations of the research. The author proceeds from historical materialism principles, notions about the economic basis and its influence on other spheres of social life development. Soviet era historians and archaeologists (as well as researchers from the People's Republic of China - from the 1950s to the present time времени⁷) have carried out significant work on classical Marxism adaptation to Eurasia societies specifics⁸. Now the attitude to the «historical materialism» legacy is ambiguous, but the author of this dissertation sees an opportunity to trace the productive forces and industrial relations gradual development on the basis of available sources.

Since the middle of the last century, the source base for historical research (including on the topic of the dissertation) has grown significantly. Works on the archaeological data integration, narrative history and ethnography are becoming

⁷Bright (and by no means the only) example - F. Engels quoting in the article about the cavalry origin (*An Zhongyi. The beginning and development of cavalry in pre-Qin period // Kaogu Yu Wenwu, 2003. №4. Pp. 34–39.*)

⁸ One example of Marxist methodology application to Eurasian societies in the study of their history (based on both archaeological and written sources) is demonstrated in the collection: *Rybakov B.A. (resp. ed.). From Pre-Class Societies to Early Classes. M.:Science, 1987. 242 p.*

more common. Sometimes we are talking about a separate discipline «ethno archeology», which can achieve great success in the study of sociocultural phenomena⁹. The author of this work is not prone to such radicalism, but ethnography data greatly contribute to understanding early nomads' socio- economic life. This is because sustainable farming systems among nomads and semi-nomads persist regardless of ethnicity or language.

In the framework of methodology and material and spiritual culture reconstruction methods on the basis of a wide range of sources the following were used: 1) general theoretical bases of domestic archaeological science (e. g., V.V. Gening); 2) elements of the structuralism approach to any society culture as a system of interrelated and interacting elements having a subject and semantic value¹⁰ (K. Levi-Strauss, Yu. M. Lotman); 3) a general idea of «basis» and «superstructure» relationship within the framework of Marxist science in its modern state (the level of economic development predetermines socio-political processes); 4) methodological tools of modern historical comparative studies¹¹.

In the process of various sources and their initial processing collecting, as well as the historical analysis of the literature, special methods of history, archaeology, ethnography, sources were used (system-structural, stratigraphic, typological, statistical, comparative-historical, situational, systemic, historical- chronological, dialectical, historical-genetic, periodization method, ideographic, retrospective). As part of the approach, individual artifacts and complexes are examined as a whole, consisting of separate elements that can develop without changing the characteristics of the system. Depending on the nature of the evaluation procedures the work provides external and internal criticism of sources, which consists of determining the authenticity and credibility of the information

⁹ For more details see, e.g. N.A. Tomilov. *Ethno archeology: New Direction of Russian Science* // *Bulletin of OmSU*, 1999. Ex. 2. P. 5-9.

¹⁰ This approach is used when working with epigraphic translated by the author as well as when analyzing art.

¹¹ Krom M. M. *Introduction to historical comparative studies: a textbook*. SPb.: Publishing House of the European University in SPb, 2015. 248 p.

contained in them. We are based on the principles of historicism and objectivity as well as on the anthropological approach (history of attitudes and microhistory).

It should be noted that despite the active analysis of the ancient societies material culture (and appropriate methods use), our research is inherently historical¹², but not archaeological (for example, the author does not intend to establish the particular category of inventory evolution). The reliance on archaeological sources is forced, because a significant part of the period studied by us is very poorly described in written monuments. In fact, it is difficult to find a solution to this problem.

Scientific novelty. In the proposed dissertation the picture of economic and cultural development of North China population in the VI-III centuries is recreated. A significant amount of new material not previously available to the Russian-speaking researcher has been systematized. For example, new and little-known burial monuments¹³. Comparative analysis with Altai-Sayan Scythian time cultures and Xinjiang, including artifacts with Scythian-Siberian animal style features. We were able to identify a number of significant characteristics in the direction of chronological and cultural belonging (including in the context of population groups movement from the north to the south of China in the IV-III c. BC).

For the first time in European science, the author publishes a voluminous study of Romani coins in China which not only gives their physical characteristics and detection location but also reconstructs their distribution sphere and the social

¹²This approach is described in the classical work of Vladislav Buzescul, originally published in Kharkov in 1910. (reissue: Buzescul V. P. Introduction to the history of Greece. Overview of sources and sketches of the Greek history development in XIX and at the beginning of XX c. / Entered. Art. and General. Ed. Prof. E. D. Frolov.: Publishing House «Kolo», 672 p.). For example, in the section «3. Real monuments». Among the prominent contemporary researchers, for example, A.I. Ivanchik referred to this problem (Ivanchik A.I., Kulanda S.V. Source of Prewritten History and Early Stages of Socio genesis. Archaic Society: Central Problems of Development Sociology. Moscow: Institute of History of the USSR, 1991. P. 192-216.).

¹³Thus, our thesis complements and develops (on the basis of new materials) the scientific direction the origins of which lie in the New Time (for example, in 1648. I. Gottfried published «Full description of the world and peoples» - *Expositio totius mundi et gentium*, the Roman narrative monument of the middle of the IV c. A.D.). In the framework of modern science on this topic in the middle of the last century were such monumental works as, for example: Pigulevskaya N. V. Byzantium on the way to India. M; L: Academy of Sciences of the USSR Publishing House, 1951. 410 p. + Fig.

status of the owners. New material and epigraphic sources have been introduced into the scientific circulation, indicating a noticeable influence of Hellenistic art and Christianity (sometimes existing in parallel) on the GSR.

In this paper, the Silk Road is presented not as an abstract phenomenon of intercultural communication but as the result of concrete processes in a clearly defined period with obvious continuity and causal connections. The author has created a consistent concept of the Silk Road addition which considers not only the period of Silk Road direct functioning from the Han era (many episodes of the history of which are well studied) but also «preparatory stage» - processes that occurred in the early Iron Age. A dissertation showed that the nomads living north of the Yellow River were not just an external aggressive force eager to pay tribute to China, but also an important creative element (at least for the GSR). The Xiongnu and Xianbi did not simply create powerful nomadic empires. Their representatives founded dynasties in Celestial Empire territory (Tuoba-Wei, Sui, Tang, etc.). It was during their reign that the trade on the GSR flourished, imported goods quantity (for example, Roman coins, Greco-Romanesque art objects) increased, new religious teachings penetrated the Celestial Empire, spreading among the population as China itself, and his neighbors. It is noteworthy that such a pattern can be traced back to the Mongol epoch.

Approbation of the work. A number of publications on the dissertation subject was published in the following journals: Higher Attestation Commission list (23), SCOPUS (12), WoS (20). The author has participated in more than fifty conferences in Russia (Siberia, Crimea, St. Petersburg, Moscow), Belarus, Japan, China (Urumqi, Lanzhou, Xian), LPR and DPR where he consistently presented the results of his research. In 2021 on the basis of the Siberian Institute of Management of RANEPa the author supervised an internal research grant on the topic "Ethnopolitical formations on the territory of Eastern Russia and adjacent territories (at the turn of antiquity and the Middle Ages)", which eventually received a positive assessment both at the ISS and by an external expert, Doctor of History P.K. Dashkovsky (Altai State University).

Provisions made for the defense:

1) Scythian-like cultures of Northern China in the 6th-3rd centuries BC traditionally from the Bronze Age maintained close ties in the meridional direction with the nomads of Mongolia, Transbaikalia and, indirectly, with the Minusinsk Basin. In the final part of the Early Iron Age these relations extended southward to the Yangtze basin.

2) Contacts in the western direction with the population of modern Xinjiang till the end of the III century - the beginning of the II century BC are practically not registered. In particular, Shajing culture did not go westward beyond Gansu.

3) According to the archaeological and written sources the economy of Maoqinggou and Yanglang culture bearers was mainly based on cattle breeding. The Shajing culture had a more pronounced agricultural component in the economy. In all three cultures there was social and property inequality.

4). On the borders of the states of the Central Chinese Plain (CCP) in the 6th-4th centuries BC there were several semi-barbarian states of the Zhongshan type that served as a transmission link between the Central Chinese Plain and the steppe, and had a noticeable influence on these sides.

5) During the 6th-4th centuries there was a steady advance of the agricultural population of the Chinese huaxia kingdoms in the northern and western directions, which by the 3rd century BC had displaced and assimilated the pastoral population of the most fertile lands in the region of Gansu, Ordos and Ningxia.

6) The time of the end of the VI-III centuries BC (Zhangguo period in China, the "Scythian time" of Siberia, the classical and early Hellenistic periods in Greece) was a prologue of the Great Silk Road, when its main actors were formed. At the end of the second century B.C. The Central Plains of China was united under the Han Empire, the Xiongnu and Xianbi states were formed in the nomads, in the same period Rome achieved hegemony in the Mediterranean.

7) The Roman Empire (first the United and then the Eastern Empire) was perceived in China as a "balancing" power, which was expressed in the name "Great Qin," which was understood as "an empire in the west, similar to China.

8) The art objects in Hellenistic style existed in China until at least the 7th century A.D., differing in the degree of orientalizing. Coins of the Eastern Roman Empire played a huge role in the economy of the Great Silk Road (at least in the V-VIII centuries AD), being, in fact, the only gold currency in the region. China and the Eastern Empire really had a number of similarities, expressed, in addition to the "imperial idea", in similar methods of interaction with nomads.

Work structure.

The dissertation essay consists of an introduction, three chapters and a conclusion. In the first chapter, based on the analysis of scientific literature, the author revealed the degree of knowledge of scientific problems related to the research topic. Parts (sections and paragraphs) are distinguished in it in accordance with the characteristics of the sources and research literature. In addition, some terminological issues are investigated. The topic of the second chapter is the cultural, economic and socio-political life of the Scythian nomads in Northern China. The sources for the reconstruction were the funeral rite and implements, the messages of ancient Chinese authors, art and a wide range of analogies from the Eurasian steppe belt. The purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate the most important (and at the same time, very little studied¹⁴) social, cultural, economic and political processes for the formation of the GSR. The third chapter is devoted to the least studied in domestic science, but at the same time, the most important objects of the heritage of the Great Silk Road, both tangible (art objects with Hellenistic subjects, Roman coins, epigraphy) and intangible (political traditions and religious teachings). The conclusion summarizes the results of the thesis research. The first document attachment contains a detailed annotation of illustrations, while the second one contains the figures themselves (66 pcs.). Finally, the third document attachment is a list of articles (Higher Attestation Commission, WoS and SCOPUS) of the author of the thesis

¹⁴ In comparison with the synchronous events of the end of VI-III c. BC. in Greece or on the Central Plain of China.