

THE GREAT SILK ROAD AS A MEANS OF COMMUNICATION AND COOPERATION BETWEEN CIVILIZATIONS AND ITS PLACE IN THE HISTORY AND CULTURE OF THE TURKIC PEOPLES

MEDENİYETLER ARASI İLETİŞİM VE İŞBİRLİĞİ ARACI OLARAK BÜYÜK
İPEK YOLU'NUN TÜRK TOPLULUKLARININ TARİHİ VE KÜLTÜRÜNDEKİ
YERİ

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Sorumlu Yazar

Abstract

The Great Silk Road (GSR), a means of trade, ethnic and cultural relations, has an important place in the history of the two great civilizations on the Eurasian continent - Western and Eastern civilizations. GSR has connected Eastern and Western cultures for tens of centuries. GSR served to development of science, technique, technologies, international and interregional relations and exchange of cultural values on the mainland. GSR was created in the 3rd century BC and was in force until the 16th century AD. During the 17th century, the nations located on the 18,000-kilometer-long Great Silk Road played a major role in spreading new knowledge, religions, and writings to the world, in the interaction of different languages and cultures, and in the ethnic relations of peoples. The Great Silk Road passed through the territories inhabited by more than 100 peoples, representatives of many races, peoples and countries participated in the trade and economic relations carried out on this road for centuries. But among them, the ancestors of the peoples who lived in Central Asia -peoples with Turkic origins, a special role. For this reason, the location in the center of GSR has left its traces in the formation of the history, ethnopsychology, culture, languages, religious beliefs and traditions of peoples this region. It is known that the loss of importance of the Great Silk Road in the Middle Ages led to the disconnection of many countries located in the center of Eurasia from universal connections and falling into the clutches of world imperialism as a result of their backwardness in development. In our days, when humanity has entered the new world order and the era of globalization in its development, the beginning of the restoration of this ancient way of dialogue and cooperation between civilizations with the initiative of the People's Republic of China "One Belt and One Road" is not at all accidental, because humanity is based on equal cooperation. The demand for this project is increasing. Early implementation of the "One Belt and One Road" initiative will contribute to the economic well-being of the countries along the Silk Road and economic cooperation in the region, cooperation and relations between different civilizations, and peaceful development on our planet, the "One Belt and One Road" project is a huge step taken for the well-being of all countries of the World. The Turkic peoples must find their rightful place in the new Silk Road and be a bridge again between East and West, as they have been for centuries.

Araştırma Makalesi / Künye: ELTAZAROV, Juliboy. "The Great Silk Road as a Means of Communication and Cooperation Between Civilizations and Its Place in The History and Culture of the Turkic Peoples". Türk Kültürü ve Hacı Bektaş Veli Araştırma Dergisi, 113 (Mart 2025), s. 385-402. <https://doi.org/10.60163/tkhcbva.1601374>

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Key Words: Great Silk Road, Eastern and Western civilizations, Turkic peoples, intercultural communication and cooperation, Central Asia, trade, cultural relations, “One Belt and One Road” project, cooperation.

Öz

Ticaret, etnik ve kültürel ilişkilerin aracı olan Büyük İpek Yolu (BİY), Avrasya kıtasındaki iki büyük uygarlığın - Batı ve Doğu medeniyetlerinin tarihinde önemli bir yere sahiptir. BİY, Doğu ve Batı medeniyetlerini binlerce yıldır birbirine bağlamıştır. BİY, bilim, teknik, teknolojilerin, uluslararası ve bölgeler arası ilişkilerin, Avrasya anakarasında kültürel değerlerin değişiminin gerçekleşmesine hizmet etmiştir. BİY, MÖ 3. yüzyılda oluşturulmuş ve MS 16. yüzyıla kadar yürürlükte kalmıştır. Büyük İpek Yolu 1700 yıl gibi bir geniş zaman dilimi içinde 18.000 kilometre uzunluktaki güzergâh üzerinde bulunan milletlerin dünyaya yeni bilgi, din ve yazıların yaymasında, bununla birlikte farklı dillerin ve kültürlerin etkileşiminde ve çeşitli ırklara mensup halkların etnik ilişkilerinde önemli rol oynamıştır. Büyük İpek Yolu, 100'den fazla halkın yaşadığı topraklardan geçmiş, birçok ırk, halk ve ülkenin temsilcileri yüzyıllardır bu yolda yürütülen ticaret ve ekonomik ilişkilerde aktif rol almışlardır. Ancak bunların arasında Orta Asya'da yaşayan halkların, bilhassa Türklerin ataları özel bir yere sahiptir. Büyük İpek Yolu bu güzergâhın merkezinden yer almış konumundan dolayı, BİY bölge halklarının tarihi, etnopsikolojisi, kültürü, dilleri, dini inançları ve geleneklerinin oluşumunda derin izler bırakmıştır. Orta Çağ'da Büyük İpek Yolu'nun önemini kaybetmesinin, Avrasya'nın merkezinde yer alan birçok ülkenin evrensel bağlantılardan kopmasına ve netice olarak gelişmedeki geri kalmışlıkları nedeniyle dünya emperyalizminin pençesine düşmesine yol açtığı da iyi bilinmektedir. İnsanlığın küreselleşme çağına girdiği ve yenedünya düzenin oluşumu gerçekleşiyor olduğu günümüzde, Çin Halk Cumhuriyeti'nin “Tek Kuşak ve Tek Yol” girişimiyle medeniyetler arasındaki bu kadim diyalog ve işbirliği yolunun yeniden canlandırılmaya başlanması hiç de tesadüf değildir, çünkü insanlık BİY tarihinde olduğu gibi ancak eşit işbirliğine dayandığında sürdürülebilir gelişmeyi yakalayacaktır. Bu projeye olan talep artmaktadır. “Tek Kuşak Tek Yol” girişiminin bir an önce uygulanması, İpek Yolu üzerindeki ülkelerin ekonomik refahına ve Avrasya karasındaki çok yönlü işbirliğine, farklı medeniyetler arasındaki faydalı etkileşimlere ve gezeğenimizde barışçıl kalkınmaya katkıda bulunacaktır. Gerçekleştiği takdirde “Tek Kuşak Tek Yol” projesi dünyadaki tüm ülkelerin refahı için atılmış büyük bir adım olacaktır. Avrasya'daki Türk toplulukları yeni İpek Yolu'nda hak ettikleri yerlerini bulmalı ve yüzyıllardır olduğu gibi Doğu ile Batı uygarlıkları arasında yeniden köprü görevine üstlenmelidir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Büyük İpek Yolu, Doğu ve Batı uygarlıkları, Türk toplulukları, kültürlerarası iletişim ve işbirliği, Orta Asya, ticaret, kültürel ilişkiler, Çin Halk Cumhuriyeti, “Tek Kuşak ve Tek Yol” projesi, işbirliği.

Introduction

It is known that two of the greatest and most ancient cultures: Eastern and Western civilizations played a major role in the world history, and they appeared and developed under different geographical, historical and cultural conditions. These civilizations have shaped the development trends of human history and influence the development and solution of global issues even today (Putz, 2024, 500-508).

The Great Silk Road (GSR), a means of trade, ethnic and cultural relations, has an important place in the history of the two great civilizations on the Eurasian continent - Western and Eastern civilizations. GSR has connected Eastern and Western civilizations for tens of centuries. GSR served for the development of science, technique, technologies, international and interregional relations, exchange of cultural values on the mainland. GSR was created in the 3rd century BC and was in force until the 16th century AD. During the 17th century, the nations located on the 18,000-kilometer-

long Great Silk Road played a major role in spreading new knowledge, religions, and writings to the world, in the interaction of different languages and cultures, and in the ethnic relations of peoples.

The concept of “Great Silk Road” is related to the precious commodity of antiquity and the Middle Ages – *gazlama* (a special material) woven from silk, mainly associated with silk. For the first time, this term was used by the German historian-scientist Ferdinand Richthofen in his historical work called “China” published in 1877 (Putz, 2024, 1-76).

The Great Silk Road passed through the territories inhabited by more than 100 peoples, representatives of many nations, peoples and countries participated in the trade and economic relations carried out on this road for centuries. However, among them the ancestors of the peoples who lived in Central Asia played a special role. For this reason, the location in the center of GSR has left its traces in the formation of the history, ethnopsychology, culture, languages, religious beliefs and traditions of this region. In this article, comparative method was used and conclusions were tried to be drawn based on the existing sources related to the Silk Road. The results and discussions reached can be gathered under the following headings:

1. The Emergence of the Great Silk Road

In the second half of the 3rd century BC, the Parthian state in Central Asia established stable trade and economic relations with Iran, India and China. This was the beginning of the history of GSR. The stable trade and economic relations established by Parthia with the West and the East became the basis for the beginning of the movement in GSR (Kurbanov, 2010, 149-150).

The starting point of the Great Silk Road in the Western world was Rome, the capital of the Roman Empire. The road that started from Rome led to the Syrian city of Giripol through the Mediterranean Sea, there to Mesopotamia and northern Iran, through Central Asia to Eastern Turkestan, and to various regions of China. The Silk Road, as accepted in literature, is a trade network that has been the center of trade and cultural interaction throughout history, starting from China and extending to Central Asia, Anatolia and Europe.

This road, which emerged during the Han Dynasty of China in the 2nd century BC, managed to carry valuable goods such as silk, spices, porcelain and paper from China to the West. Roman, Sassanid, Byzantine and Islamic states played important roles in this trade route, and it showed great development especially during the Abbasid and Tang Dynasties between the 8th and 10th centuries. However, the importance of the road decreased due to the Ottoman Empire’s dominance over the Silk Road from the 15th century onwards and the discovery of new sea routes by Europeans. In the 19th and 20th centuries, sea trade came to the fore instead of land trade. Today, a modern version of the Silk Road is being tried to be created with the “Belt and Road” project, which is being revived under the leadership of China. This historical trade route has influenced not only economic but also cultural interaction for centuries.

The Central Asian part of the GSR started from Herat and turned north to the city of Marv. Here GSR is divided into two branches: northern and eastern branches. After crossing Oxus (Amu Darya) near Termez, the northern branch of GSR passed through Hisar mountain and Kashkadarya oasis to Kesh (present Shakhrisabz), from there to Marakanda (Samarkand) and crossed Mirzachul and exits to Chach (present Tashkent) oasis, from there it went to Fergana and crossed the Terek-Davan passing from the

Fergana valley to Eastern Turkestan.

The eastern branch, after Marv, crossed the Oks and came to Bukhara through the Karakum desert, from Bukhara to Marakanda, Chach, Ferghana Valley and East Turkestan. In general, these directions were considered the main way of communication with Hellas and Rome in Central Asia, and then with Byzantium and Iran.

There was also a third network of GSR – “Desert Road”. This network passed through the northern part of Central Asia. It started from the ancient city of Tanais on the northern coast of the Black Sea, crossed the South Russian deserts, came out of the cities of the Lower Volga, Aral Sea region, and then went to Altai and East Turkestan through the territories of present-day South Kazakhstan. Sometimes, when they came to the Aral Sea region, the caravans entered Khwarazm, and from there they passed through Bukhara and Sogd to China. There was also a network of “Desert Road” passing through the central part of Turkestan. Eastern European, Russian, Caucasian and Aral region goods were traded on the Desert Road (Brown, 2024).

During the Kushan state, the Great Silk Road became the main means of trade-economic, cultural, religious-ethnic relations between the peoples of Central Asia and India. During this period, a new culture - the Kushan culture - was formed from Eastern, Greek, Indian and nomadic cultures and traditions. Kushan rulers established stable relations with Rome, China and India. The Central Asia-India route of GSR was connected by dozens of network roads. The busiest network was Marv-Kushka-Herat-Kandahar route (Kurbanov, 2010, 150).



Map 1. The branches of the Great Silk Road
(Source: https://www.worldhistory.org/Silk_Road/)

There was also a central network connecting the banks of the Amu Darya through the Hindu Kush passes to Kabul and from there to the Indus Valley. The length of these networks was 500-600 km, and the caravans reached their destination in 15-20 days (Yoshida, 2013, 375).

During the reign of Ashoka, one of the Kushan emperors, cultural cooperation between India and Central Asia increased. Especially in the Kushan state at the end of the 3rd century BC, Buddhism spread rapidly in the Central Asian regions of the Kushan empire due to the declaration of Buddhism as the state religion.

At the same time, traces of the influence of Greek culture can be seen in Kushan culture. In particular, the metal and bronze tools made in that period have images of the heroes of Greek mythology - Eros, Heracles, Maren and the historical figure - Alexander the Great. The Kushan script was created based on the Greek alphabet (Mamleva, 1999, 591–593).

The culture and art of the Kushan period later spread to China, Japan, and Indochina through the Great Silk Road, and some of its elements have survived to our time as elements of cultural heritage.

2. Function of Ancient Sogd and Sogd Traders

After the collapse of the Kushan kingdom, two centers were formed in its place - Peshavar (India) and Sogd (Central Asia), which controlled the GSR. Although the influence of Hellenistic culture was high in Sogdian culture, local art traditions were also strong. Sogdians speak one of the local Eastern Iranian languages, and this ethnos and this language (Sogdians and Sogdian) played a major role in the early medieval history of the Great Silk Road. The Sogdian language was spread in the regions from Sogd to China. The Sogdian script, derived from the ancient Aramaic script, was also widely used during this period. By the time of the Kangyu state, it was replaced by another script, the Uyghur script, which was spread along GSR (Zamonov, 2021, 375-394). Russian scholar W.W. Barthold, a connoisseur of the history of Central Asia, especially Turkestan, explains the spread and intermingling of languages and writings in Central Asia with the development of trade relations and religious propaganda: “No language and writing can compete with the Sogdian-Uyghur alphabet, it was used to write religious texts of three religions - Buddhist, Manichean and Christian. Only after a long time, these writings were replaced by the Arabic script in the West, and by the Tibetan script in the East” (Barthold, 1927, 12).

During most of the history of GSR, Sogd became a rich trading country. At that time, there were 30 large and 300 medium-sized cities in Sogd. Chinese sources describe Sogd as “the land of the rich”. I. Bichurin, who specially studied the information of the ancient Chinese sources about the peoples of Central Asia, studied many sources written down by Chinese merchants and ambassadors, according to which the Chinese described the Sogds as “people very fond of trade... Urban people wear very expensive clothes, women’s dresses are made of royal fabrics, and men wear vests made of velvet fabric. People are very fond of wine and like to sing and dance in the streets. Each household produces thousands of liters of wine. As soon as a man reaches the age of twenty, he leaves for the neighboring countries and goes where he sees profit” (Bichurin, 1951, 272, 310).

By the middle of the 5th century AD, the Hephthalite state was established in Central Asia. The Hephthalites (White Huns) established extensive trade and economic relations with Iran, Byzantium, India and China. They traded with silk fabrics, mirrors, sweets, precious stones and paints. Considering the period indicated above, besides the coins of the Hephthalites, the coins of the Sassanids were also used in trade. Indeed, the discovery of Hephthalites coins and silver vessels in archaeological excavations on the banks of the Volga and Kama rivers shows that trade increased in

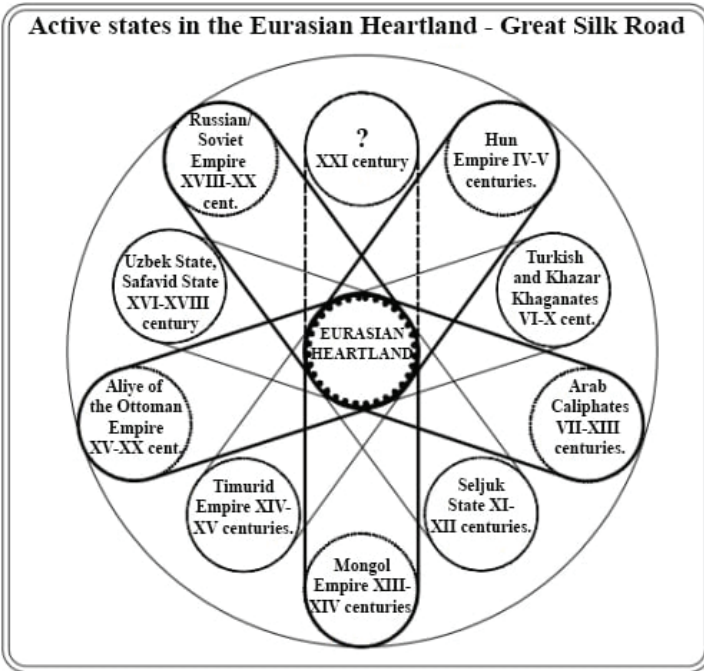
the northern branch of the GSR. In addition, many products were sold to China during the Hephthalites period (Lyashchenko, 1947, 20).

During this period, the peoples of the East enriched each other's cultures thanks to the political-cultural-economic relations implemented through the GSR. In particular, the mural paintings of the Hephthalite era are similar to the paintings of Buddhist temples in Eastern Turkestan of the 5th-6th centuries.

3. Turkic Control of the Great Silk Road in Ancient Times

In the 5th-3rd centuries BC, peoples who speak the eastern branch of Turkic languages lived in Altai and Southern Siberia. The rich nature of this region became the basis for the development of animal husbandry and related crafts. In the land of the Eastern Turks, there was a lot of meat, milk, leather, and bone products, and agriculture was well developed. In the 5th century BC, the Eastern Turks settled in Yettisu and directly interfered in the trade in GSR. In this regard, from the 6th century BC, GSR moved to the north, another branch of the road was opened (Golden, 1992, 117). In general, in the history, the ancestors of today's Central Asian peoples, especially the Turkic dynasties, played a major role in the successful functioning of the Central Asian region, and Chinese civilization played the role of the "world factory" just like in our time, also played a major role in the stable implementation of social, political and cultural relations (*see chart 1*).

Picture 1. Ruling Powers in the Eurasian Heartland



Picture 1. Active people's and states in the Eurasian Heartland – Great Silk Road.

Nomadic empires have always been a favorable market for merchants, who sold scarce cloth for the nomads for the great profit; they bought skins, wool, bones, meat and wool from the settlers. Because of this, the caravans that came to Bukhara and

Samarkand no longer entered the Fergana valley, but reached Yettisu through the present city of Jambul and returned back.

In the 6th century AD, a new great empire of the ancient Turks - the Turkic Khaganate - was formed in Central Asia, South Siberia, Tibet and the steppes of Mongolia. The Turkic Khaganate played a major role in the development of the Great Silk Road, the promotion of relations between East and West, Buddhism and Christianity, nomadic and settled civilizations to a new level.

Certainly, the Turkic Empire tried to capture the Great Silk Road from the beginning up to the end, and along the way it clashed with Iran. The Turks tried to use the Northern “Desert Network” of the GSR, which bypasses Iran. They also sought to form an alliance with Iran’s rival, Byzantium. They sent an ambassador to Constantinople in 568-569 and formed an alliance with Byzantium against Iran, and established trade relations through the northern branch of the GSR (Gao, 1991, 731). During this period, the influence allies of the Turks - Sogdian’s language, writing, and culture on the peoples living on the Great Silk Road increased dramatically. From the 30s of the 7th century, many Sogdian colonies began to emerge in Yettisu and Eastern Turkestan. Chinese traveler Xuan Xiang (Zhang Qian), who visited Central Asia in 630, wrote that he came across many cities and Sogdian colonies. Sogdian merchants organized large trade fairs in cities (Francis, 2006, 165-184).

In the 630s, the borders of the Western Turkic Khanate extended to the basins of the Indus River. In addition to its traditional trade with China and Iran, Indian trade has also been added. Trade caravans reached the valleys of East Turkestan via Marv - Charjui - Bukhara - Samarkand - Chach - Isfijab - Talas - Suyab, and then went to China. During this period, Sogdian colonies spread to the shores of Lake Lobnor on the border of Eastern Turkestan and China. At that time, a very large and successful business was established in GSR. Silk, velvet fabrics, other various gauzes, glassware, jewelry, ornaments, leather products, dozens of other types of goods passed from China to Byzantium and vice versa from Byzantium to China with trade caravans, Samarkand, Bukhara, Tashkent, Marv, Kashgar, Suyab, Kucha and Turfan, goods and wealth flowed. Most of the inhabitants of these cities were engaged in crafts or trade. The city of Paykend (Baykend) near the city of Bukhara was called “the city of merchants”. Nine trade ambassadors were sent from here to China in 627-647 (Mallory, 1997, 5-16).

4. Islam and The Great Silk Road

In the 7th century, the Arabs captured the part of the Great Silk Road from Byzantium to the borders of China. It is not for nothing that the Arab marches to Central Asia were carried out along the central branch of GSR, that is, in the direction of Syria-Iraq (Ajam)-Iran-Marv-Bukhara-Samarkand-Fergana. A new religion - Islam, Arabic script and language spread among the peoples living in these parts of the Great Silk Road. Islamic civilization was formed in the regions of the Great Silk Road.

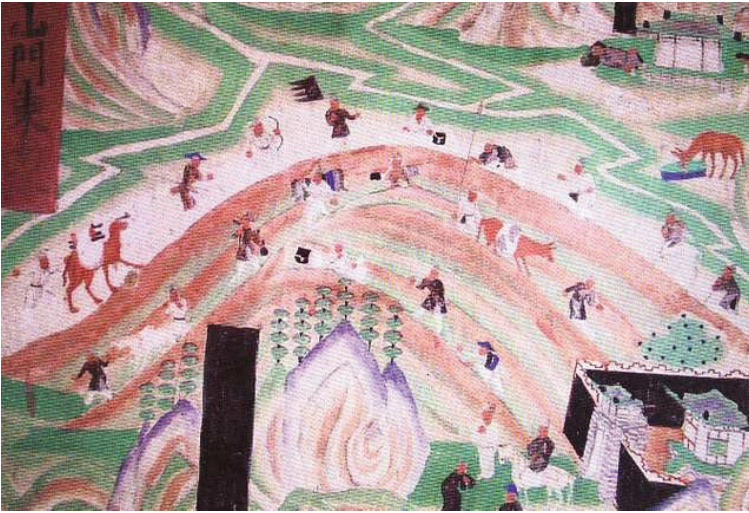
The care of the Arab caliphs about trade in GSR was also related to the spread of Islam. The fact that it is obligatory for every Muslim to make a pilgrimage to Mecca once in his life and it also served for the development of trade routes, the mobility of Muslims and the increase of their knowledge of geography. The presence of the strong authority of the Arab caliphs in most of Eurasia ensured the movement and safety of caravans. The Arab dynasties that ruled in Damascus and Baghdad established trade with India and China, Byzantium, the Volga region and Eastern Europe. In the 8th-

10th centuries, the main part and branches of GSR were in the territories of the Arab caliphate, therefore, GSR brought great benefits to the caliphate. This benefit served the stronger development of Muslim civilization (Richthofen, 2007, 39-42).

In every major center of the trade routes from Spain to China, there were definitely Muslim communities with their mosques, hotels and caravanserais. Gradually, most of the trade went to the hands of Muslim merchants. Muslim experts were willingly accepted in various countries in all fields of commerce, science, and office work. Military advisers, trading agents, irrigation specialists, scientists and astrologers of many countries were Muslims. In this way, the path of GSR served to spread the achievements of Muslim civilization to the world (Bosworth, 2023, 24).

Shortly after the Arabs invaded Central Asia, a strong Islamic civilization was formed here. Such great scientists as Abu Nasr Farabi, Ahmed al-Farghani (Alfraganus), Muhammad al-Khwarazmi, Muhammad al-Beruni, Ibn Sina (Avicenna) who made a great contribution to the development of world science are representatives of this civilization. They wrote their works in Arabic, that's why western historians of science have long described them as "Arab scholars". In fact, they were representatives of a great civilization that spread along the cities of the Great Silk Road. During the Takhirid dynasty, which was the last period of Arab rule in Central Asia, and especially during the Samanid period, Transoxania achieved great success in the production and sale of goods for GSR. The trade between the valley and desert areas of the region, agricultural oases and nomadic desert inhabitants increased, and caravan trade developed further.

As a result of these circumstances, craft developed in Transoxania towns and villages. In a village called Zandana near Bukhara, gauze made from cotton was sold to Iran and India. In Iskijkent, on the banks of the Syrdarya, there are similar gasses; In Bukhara, sheep wool, special hair oils, carpets, saddles, melons; In Samarkand, fabrics with silvery strings, brocade, all kinds of silk fabrics, scarves, leather products, large copper pots; In Rabinjan, winter clothes woven from red wool, leather products, zinc vessels; in Binakent (Tashkent), leather saddles, shields, tents, clothes, onions and arrows were produced and sold to the countries and peoples of GSR.



Picture 2. Trade on the Great Silk Road. A wall painting found in Dunhuang (China).
(Source: <https://artandarchaeology.princeton.edu/whats/news/dunhuang-buddhist-art-and-explorers-silk-road>).

By the 10th century, Ilaq (the cities of Angren and Almaliq in present-day Uzbekistan) became the center of mining and smelting of silver and lead ores throughout the East. The third mint in Transoxania would be built here (before that there were two mints in Bukhara and Samarkand). Silver coins minted in these mints have been found in archaeological excavations in Eastern Europe. Caravan trade required separate and complex types of services. Caravans with separate rooms for merchants and servants, additional buildings for pack animals (horses, camels, donkeys, mules - pack animals) should be built in settlements where trade caravans pass, appropriate food for people and beast of burden (fodder and provisions) had to be prepared. Wholesale trade was carried out in the caravanserai, prices were determined and fixed. There was also a special group of traders and merchants who delivered the goods to the respective destinations and markets. The beasts of burden were looked after by special shepherds. Caravans had special guides and armed guards (security) and translators (Bosworth, 2023, 24-25).

Caravans could consist of 30-40 to 2-3 thousand beasts of burden. For example, in 922, al-Muqtadir, the caliph of Baghdad, sent a caravan of 3,000 camels and 5,000 people to the Bulgar kingdom in Volga region. Such large caravans were not only intended for commercial purposes. In particular, the aforementioned caravan of Caliph al-Muqtadir was sent to achieve diplomatic, military-technical and religious goals. The observations (memoirs) of the Arab traveler Ibn Fadlan, who was a secretary in this caravan, well explained the importance of the trade caravans traveling on the Great Silk Road in the establishment of relations between countries and peoples (Fadlan)¹.

5. Turks and Silk Road in the Middle Ages in Turkestan Geography in General

The relations on the Great Silk Road flourished during the Karakhanids, Seljuks, and Khwarazmshahs. Every Turkic dynasty and every great ruler who ruled in Central Asia understood the importance of the Great Silk Road and helped its development. For example, Tekesh, the founder of the Khwarazmshah dynasty, issued a special decree at the beginning of his reign, wrote about how to treat fairly to civil servants and people from far and near, Turkish and foreign merchants, wrote about not to interfere with commercial activities, and ensure security on trade routes, so he made it as the primary task to fully protect merchants and their goods (Buniyatov, 1986, 138).

It is known that the biggest wars in the history of Central Asia were caused by the domination of the Great Silk Road or the violation of trade and embassy rules established in the GSR for centuries. For example, in 1215 Khwarazmshah sent an ambassador to Genghis Khan who occupied Beijing. Genghis Khan, who received the ambassadors of Khwarazmshah Muhammad in Beijing, said that he considered Khwarazmshah to be the king of the Western countries, and said that he had intended to conclude a treaty of friendship and started trade between the Mongol State and the Khwarazmshah State (Gumilev, 1993, 460).

In turn, Genghis Khan also sent ambassadorial caravans of 400 camels to Khorezmshah twice. The first caravan was headed by a Muslim merchant from Khorezm - Mahmud Yalavach, who arrived in his homeland as an ambassador of Genghis Khan. The second caravan of Genghis Khan was plundered in the border town of Khwarazm - Otrar, and the head of the caravan was killed. According to

1 Caliph al-Muqtadir wanted the Bulgarian people to convert to Islam, and this caravan was sent to achieve this goal.

the diplomatic ethics established on the Great Silk Road, this unprecedented case was considered a great disrespect for the country and the king. In such cases, the declaration of war was obvious. In 1219, Genghis Khan stopped his campaigns in Southeast Asia, declared war on Khorezm and began his famous Western campaign. How this ended for the Central Asian Turkic state and the Turkic civilization is known - this campaign had sad consequences.

6. Amir Timur and The Timurid Period in The History of the Great Silk Road

Amir Timur and the Timurid period occupy a special place in the history of the Great Silk Road. By the end of the 1380s, Amir Timur captured Transoxania, Khorasan, and Ajam, and took control of the central and southern directions of GSR. The northern branch of GSR – “Desert Road” was under the control of the Golden Horde, and this branch managed to become the main branch of GSR during the period of feudal disunity in Transoxania and the struggle against the Mongol tyranny. The Mongol khans of the Golden Horde built many cities, caravanserais and rabats on the coasts of Dashti Kypchak, Volga River region, and the Black Sea, which ensured the successful operation of the northern branch of GSR. Italian merchants-ambassadors Plano Carpini and William of Rubruck, who traveled to the Mongol Empire in the 13th century, also noted this situation (Hakluyt, 1957, 109, 110, 118, 185).

Amir Timur during his campaigns against the Golden Horde in 1391 and 1395 destroyed the military power of this country as well as the trade and economic system (cities, caravanserais, rabats...). The central branch of the Great Silk Road regained its importance and force (Grousset, 1989, 486-534), trade caravans again went from China to the Middle East Otrar - Tashkent - Samarkand - Balkh - Herat - Sultania - Tire - Damascus-Sila routes. The goods going to both sides of present GSR passed through Turkestan, the territories which was under the control of Amir Timur and the center of his empire.

During the time of Amir Timur, absolute order and peace were established in GSR, merchants could travel without any worries. Clavijo, the ambassador of the Spanish King of Castile, traveled from Trebizond (today's Trabzon in Turkey) to Samarkand for 4 months. In his memoirs, Clavijo wrote that “the whole country is peaceful under Temur's rule” (Clavijo, 1891, 398). According to him, starting from Tabriz (a city in the territory of Iran), horses were ready for ambassadors and couriers at the special stations on the roads; security guards were always on alert. Road guards were responsible for the safety of ambassadors, couriers and merchants, the preservation and integrity of transported goods.

In Khorasan, merchants from Syria, Genoa, the Ottoman Empire, Baghdad, Egypt, and Arab countries would gather and organize large caravans and go to Transoxania via Mashhad and Balkh. The road to India passed through the city of Balkh and the Hindu Kush mountains. They brought nutmeg, aromatic spices, and fabrics from India. Wool, leather goods and clothes were brought from Dashti Kypchak. From the east and China were brought silk fabrics, precious stones, medicines, porcelain dishes. Turkestan, where Timur gathered the best masters of the territories he conquered, exported handicraft products to the four corners of the world - various fabrics, glass and glass products, and metal tools.

Revenues from trade, which increased to an unprecedented level in GSR, were an important source of income for Timur and the Timurid state. Customs duties and taxes were collected from all caravans and merchants in each major trading city. A

non-Muslim merchant was charged twice as much. The way of traders from all over the world ended or started here in Samarkand - the capital of Amir Temur's empire. In the 14th and 15th centuries, Samarkand became the center of the world trade and the center of the Eurasian continent. The description of the power of Timur's state, the buildings, madrasas, markets in Samarkand and other cities of Turkestan spread to the world as the impressions of those merchants, ambassadors and travelers, and remained in history.

Unfortunately, the decline of the Timurid state at the beginning of the 16th century also marked the decline of GSR. Shortly after the Timurids - in 1440-1498, ruler of the Bukhara Khanate Abdullah Khan tried to restore the GSR, sent embassies and caravans to China and Russia. Although Abdullah Khan achieved some success in these matters, this was the last revival of GSR (Zamonov, 2021, 264). The historical, geographical and political reasons for the loss of the importance of the Great Silk Road lie in the events that took place far away from Central Asia. In the last Middle Ages, due to the weakening of Byzantium, feudal disunity and wars in Europe, the production forces of the Western world completely stopped; the trade object (goods) and opportunities of Europe were disappearing.

7. The Relationship Between the Fall of Byzantium and the Rise of the Turks with the Great Geographical Discoveries

By the 15th century, the situation changed. Until this time, the trade routes between the East and the West were in the hands of Asian and Muslim-Turkic peoples. After that, the type and owners of the trade route changed. World trade began to be carried out more and more through sea routes; the Spaniards, Portuguese, Dutch, and British began to take over world trade carried out by sea routes. In the 15th and 16th centuries, the Europeans, who had learned the world's sea routes and shipbuilding well, were not pleased by the reports of Marco Polo, Plano Carpini, Rubruk and other travelers about the inexhaustible riches of the East (India, China...). The sea route to China, India, and other Eastern countries was desperately searched. Many expeditions to unknown waterways were organized. For example, the Portuguese sailed to the Indian Ocean around the Cape of Kind Hope in southern Africa in 1486, and Vasco da Gama sailed to India in 1498 and landed in Calcutta.

As the Russian scientist P.I. Lyashenko rightly noted, "The opening of the waterway to India (1498) destroyed the importance of the ancient land caravan routes leading to the East through Syria, Georgia, Armenia, and Central Asia. The conquest of Constantinople by the Turks (1453), which happened almost at the same time, led to the closure of the road between the East and the West. With the discovery of America (1492), the world trade suddenly passed into the hands of the Western world" (Lyashchenko, 1947, 340).

In the Middle Ages, the GSR was a channel for the exchange of new goods, knowledge, social ideas, and a means of intercultural communication for the peoples of Eurasia. The spread of various goods produced in different countries along the Great Silk Road made it possible for peoples to adopt new customs and traditions. From this point of view, first of all, the people of Western Europe benefited from this. In particular, materials woven from silk and cotton improved the personal hygiene of Europeans, spices helped in the preparation of medicines, food preservation and long-term storage. Central Asian and Chinese technology pushed parchment and papyrus, which were inconvenient for writing paper, out of European life, led to the

popularization of manuscript books and, ultimately, to the emergence of the printing industry.

Along the Great Silk Road, not only goods, but also knowledge about the methods of their preparation was spread. For example, silk was first produced only in China, in the 1st-2nd centuries of our era, in Eastern Turkestan, in the 5th century in Iran, in the 6th century in Byzantium, silkworm rearing and silk production were mastered. Some goods came to the field as products of several peoples and generations in the GSR. For example, gunpowder was discovered in China in the 9th century, and in the 14th century firearms - cannons were invented using gunpowder (in China, Central Asia, Eastern Europe - it is unknown). The knowledge and technology of this weapon spread throughout the GSR - in the middle of the 15th century, the Turks who conquered Istanbul, the Portuguese who opened the road to India, and the countries of Central Asia knew about the cannon as a military weapon.

Many types of animals, plants, and agriculture also spread among different peoples due to the GSR. For example, in the 3rd century BC, in the earliest period of the existence of the Great Silk Road, the Chinese discovered the presence of argumaks- galloping and tall horses, which are legendary for China, in Ferghana, and managed to bring their descendants to China. At that time, the Chinese also learned from Ferghana how to grow the most necessary plant for Ferghana's lucerne (Forbes, 2011, 3-88). As a result of the functions of GSR the Chinese took grapes, beans, onions, cucumbers, carrots and other agricultural (food) crops from Central Asia and spread them throughout the Asian continent. Thus, in cultural-scientific-economic relations in GSR, the West mainly absorbed innovations related to industrial production. Because China and the Islamic world were ahead of Europe in this field until the 17th and 18th centuries. Also, Europeans could not completely master some of the technologies of the masters of the East, for example, the manufacture of steel weapons and the production of crystal vessels were rediscovered in the West during the industrial revolution (18th-19th centuries).

The geographical ideas of the Western world about the world were very weak until they received Abu Raihan Beruni's world map (globe), Mirza Ulugbek's catalogue of stars and world map from the East through the Great Silk Road (XIV-XV centuries). Europeans' ideas about the world and the Asian continent were at the level of "knowledge" described in the works of Eratosthenes, who lived in the 3rd century BC, and the Roman scientist Claudius Ptolemy, who lived in the 2nd century AD. Great geographical discoveries were actually made on the basis of maps and charts of Muslim scholars (Buang, 2008, 1-5).

Merchants like Marco Polo, who traveled along the Great Silk Road, learned how to think and act globally like Muslims and Orientals. "A book about Marco Polo's Travel" was very popular in Western Europe, and its information inspired travelers from Vasco da Gama to Columbus to set sail in search of the fabled China and India. And, finally, GSR played a major role in spreading the great historical and modern religions of the World. Buddhism (Buddhism) was the first religion that spread throughout GSR. In the first centuries AD, Buddhism was the state religion of the Kushan state. Buddhist monks went to Central Asia and China with trade caravans and spread this religion. Chinese Buddhists used to go to India to study the teachings of Buddha. As a result of these contacts, Buddhism spread throughout Southeast Asia.

Although the religion of Islam was first spread in Central Asia by the force of arms of the Muslim armies, in the following centuries it was spread to Eastern Turkestan,

parts of the Mongolian Empire in the steppes of Kypchak and Bolga river's region and to the Indian peninsula by means of the Great Silk Road. Christianity also tried to spread its influence to the East with the help of GSR in the ancient (pre-Islamic) period of the history of GSR. After the split in Christianity at the Ephesus religious meeting in 431, the Nestorians fled to Iran and Central Asia to escape the persecution of their co-religionists. The Nestorian religious group even reached China.

Until the Mongol khans and nobles embraced the Muslim religion (14th century), they were sympathetic to all religions, so in the 13th century, Christians tried to spread their religion in the Mongol Empire along trade routes. At that time, there were Christian colonies in cities from Sultanate to Khanbaliq (Beijing). Their groups were preserved for two or three centuries because they were related to the trade in GSR. It can be said that the adoption of the Jewish religion by the powerful Turkish state - the Khazar Kingdom in the present-day South Russian steppes and the Volga region in the 8th-10th centuries was also related to the functions of the GSR. Thus, for almost 2000 years, the rule of the Great Silk Road, the only means of spreading civilization on Earth, formed intensive and permanent political-economic-cultural relations. This led to the strong development of cultural-ethnic relations in the regions where the GSR passed.

Since a very large period of the history of the peoples of Central Asia which was related to the GSR, this situation was reflected in the national mentality, ethnopsychology, customs and traditions of the Uzbeks, Kazakhs, Karakalpaks, Uyghurs, Kyrgyz, Turkmen and Tajiks who lived here. In particular, it proves that the people are very hospitable, they don't care about the nationality and religion of the people around them, besides, being successful in learning new knowledge and technologies, staying mobile and having eager to trade is the most prestigious profession which might be even in today's life.

8. Attempts to Restore the Silk Road Centuries Later

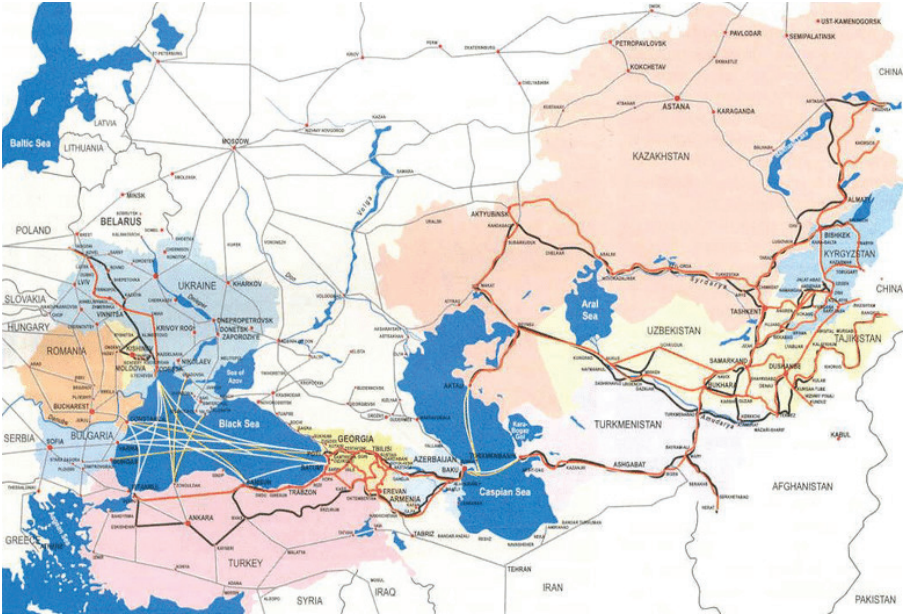
The great experience of the Great Silk Road in human development and intercivilizational communication is very important in today's era of globalization processes. Cooperation instead of conflict, religious tolerance instead of inter-religious conflict, friendship of civilizations instead of the struggle of civilizations are the main signs of the Great Silk Road culture. After the "hot" and "cold" wars of the 20th century, humanity should understand the essence of these values.

Organizations such as the international community, the United Nations (UN), and UNESCO are conducting a policy of reviving GSR and these traditions, taking into account these characteristics of the GSR culture. In particular, in 1987-1997, UNESCO's "Silk Road - Road of the Dialogues" program was implemented. After the independence of the post-Soviet Central Asian countries, a lot of work was done for the restoration of GSR. Because it was an important task to find an alternative to the roads passing through Russia to the 5 newly independent countries located in the center of Eurasia. Because these countries must use the Tashkent-Orenburg railway, which was built in 1903, or the Trans-Siberian railway (or St. Petersburg-Vladivostok railway) were forced to use.

For this reason, the countries of Central Asia supported the TRACECA (Transport Corridor Europe – Caucasus – Asia) program, developed at the proposal of the European Union, aimed at restoring the historical Great Silk Road. In May 1993, in Baku, the capital of the Republic of Azerbaijan, at a conference organized by the Ministers of

Transport and Trade of 8 Asian countries, the declaration of these countries and the European Union on the construction of a new Asian transport corridor was adopted. In September 1998, a conference devoted to the restoration of the historical Great Silk Road was held in Baku, and representatives of 32 Asian countries participated in it and signed a multilateral agreement on the opening and development of the Europe-Caucasus-Asia transport route.

On September 20-22, 1999, at the initiative of the Government of the Republic of Uzbekistan, an international conference dedicated to the restoration of the Great Silk Road was held in Tashkent. At the conference, the direct representatives of the TRACECA program and delegations from Azerbaijan, Armenia, Bulgaria, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Romania, Tajikistan, Turkey, Uzbekistan, Ukraine, and Turkmenistan, as well as Syria, Iran, and China participated. At the conference, agreements were reached on many issues of establishing TRACECA.



Map 2. The New Great Silk Road is being built under the TRACECA program

(Source: <https://portsukraine.com/economy/developing-transport-connections-a-look-at-the-traceca-program/>)

The TRACECA program is financed by the European Bank of Reconstruction and Development, the International Monetary Fund, and the Bank of Asia. Within the framework of this project, the construction of the railways, highways, reconstruction of existing roads, construction of ports in the Black Sea and Caspian Sea, fiber-optical communication networks along the road were established (Mamleva, 1999, 2). In 1993-2006, a total of 92 projects were implemented within the framework of the TRACECA program, and 700 million euros were spent on these works. The initiative of the European Union member countries about exporting gas and oil to Central Asian region - were not successfully implemented as the Nabucco and the TRACECA projects. (9). Projects to export hydrocarbon resources of the region to the East - to China and Egypt are also being implemented. In particular, at the beginning of 2006, the Atasu-Alashankou oil pipeline supplying Kazakhstan's oil to China was put into

operation. 20 million tons of oil were exported to China from this oil pipeline which worth 800 million dollars and 960 km long.

In August 2007, the construction of a new Turkmenistan-China gas pipeline with a length of 7000 km was started. This gas pipeline in the direction of Turkmenistan - Uzbekistan - Kazakhstan - China was put into operation in 2009, and 30 billion cubic meters of gas are supplied to China annually. It is clear that the New Great Silk Road is no longer just a transport route, it is an oil and gas pipeline route. From these oil and gas pipelines, raw materials are sent to developed countries, and new technologies and new knowledge come from there. When these oil and gas pipelines are fully operational, Central Asia can again become an economically attractive region of the World.

9. China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan (CKU) Railway Project

In the next part of this article, we can talk about the intentions of the People's Republic of China to form five land routes to Europe at the same time based on the initiatives, two Russian routes, as well as China-Kazakhstan-Azerbaijan-Georgia-Turkey- Europe, China - Pakistan - Iran - Turkey - Europe, China - Kazakhstan - Kyrgyzstan - Uzbekistan and the possibility of going to Iran, Turkey and Europe through Turkmenistan or Afghanistan. Due to the war in Ukraine, along with the weakening of efforts to develop Russian routes (China - Russia / Trans-Siberian / - Europe; China - Kazakhstan - Russia - Europe), Central Asian countries, Transcaucasia or Iran is clear that they are activating work in the direction of creating new ones that will go to Turkey and Europe.

The news about the construction of the China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan (CKU) railway, which will begin in October of 2024, that appeared in the press recently, is a real proof of this. It should be noted that currently Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan are countries that have reached a closed end in terms of logistics. These two countries are (landlocked countries)- don't use sea like the entire post-Soviet Central Asian countries (Uzbekistan is landlocked twice). Goods from Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan often go through Kazakhstan and Russia or China to reach the world markets by sea and international cargo transportation. The CKU railway has long been considered, but its geopolitical importance has come to the agenda in 2022, starting with the Russian invasion to Ukraine. Regardless of the results of the war in Ukraine, it is certain that the railway networks passing through Russia will not play an active role in commercial relations with the West for at least 50 years. In addition, the CKU railway is attractive with indicators such as shortening the route from China to Europe by 900 kilometers, reducing the transit time of cargo by about eight days without passing through the territory of Russia and the Trans-Siberian railway. The main part of the planned construction of the CKU railway will be carried out in Kyrgyzstan and Western China, while Uzbekistan already has a developed domestic railway network (Putz, 2024, 76). The successful implementation of the CKU railway project is the first step of the "One Belt, One Road" initiative to make Central Asia a political, economic and cultural bridge between Eastern and Western civilizations.

10. Is the "One Belt, One Road" initiative of the People's Republic of China and Turkic World?

Nowadays, the issue of establishing control over the Eurasian heartland, an important geostrategic area where the Silk Road is located, is becoming very

important, as it has been in history. In 1991, ten years after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, two important events initiated by the People's Republic of China that marked a turning point in the new history of GSR. The first of these events is the emergence of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), which was established on June 15, 2001, in world geopolitics, and the second is the "One Belt, One Road" a plan of the President of the People's Republic of China, Xi Jinping.



Map 3. China's "One Belt, One Road" project

(Source: Cao, Jinping. *Five Issues Worth Noticing on the 'One Belt, One Road' initiative*; <http://www.geopolitika.hu/en/2018/02/13/five-issues-worth-noticing-on-the-one-belt-one-road-initiative/>).

Returning this trade route to its medieval dynamics, which led to the rapid enrichment of the countries and societies that established its rule, and was the subject of constant wars in different periods due to its geo-economic and strategic importance, is an issue that has been on the agenda of the countries of the region in recent years. GSR is no longer a trade of only silk or spice. Today, it is once again becoming a global production and trade route.

Therefore, during his visit to Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan on September 3-13, 2013, the President of the People's Republic of China Xi Jinping in his speech at the Nazarbayev University in Kazakhstan mentioned about the historical Great Silk Road. In his speech, the Chinese leader emphasized the importance of creating a single Silk Road economic space based on the principles for the benefit of all sides and by developing commercial relations that unite the countries of the region, like the European Union (global West) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (global East). China aims to develop political ties by strengthening economic relations through this project. Thus, it is intended to create a significant political influence for

the countries involved in the project (Taner, 2020, 117-133).

This initiative, officially called “One Belt, One Road”, covers five main areas of cooperation:

- Development policy coordination,
- formation of networks of infrastructure and necessary objects,
- strengthening investment and trade relations,
- Increasing financial cooperation,
- Deepening social and cultural exchanges.

As of 2017, the countries covered by the project account for 40 percent of global product exports. After the implementation of this great initiative of the PRC, the time of transportation of cargo across GSR will be reduced by 12%, the exchange of goods will increase from 2.7% to 9.7%, and the income will increase by 3.4%. The countries participating in the project aimed to make infrastructure investments in the following directions:

- Railways,
- Highways,
- Airports,
- Pipes,
- Ports,
- Optical fiber transmission lines,
- Power lines,
- Free trade zones,
- Logistics bases,
- Infrastructure projects,
- Financial incentives and investments,
- Technology transfer,
- Other energy projects.

The government of the People’s Republic of China aims to spend 8 trillion dollars on the implementation of this initiative, and Chinese strategists have prepared the project in such way that it is inevitable that countries and global companies will compete to get their share of this cake.

Conclusion

As is known, the Silk Road has always been the focus of researchers with its historical, commercial and cultural characteristics. In this respect, the concept of the Silk Road is discussed in terms of interaction, communication and cooperation between civilizations in the article and its historical importance for Turkish communities is mentioned. The discussion topics are gathered under the following headings: The emergence and historical process of the Silk Road, Ancient Sogdian civilization and the function of Sogdian merchants, the Great Silk Road and ancient Turks, Islam and the Great Silk Road, the importance of this historical road in Turkestan in the Middle Ages, the strategic value of this road during the Amir Timur period, the relationship between the Silk Road and great geographical discoveries, the role of the GSR in relations between Eurasian civilizations, attempts to restore the Great Silk Road, the China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan (CKU) railway project, what does the “One Belt, One Road” initiative of the People’s Republic of China mean, is it a new Silk Road Project? Therefore, after these

issues have been considered, the following questions still remain current and await solutions from their interlocutors.

Do the countries of Organization of Turkic States have any strategy in this regard to implement this great project in such a competitive environment? If not, how should the roadmap for these strategies and actions be formulated? Where are the countries of Central Asia in the “One Belt, One Road” project, which is sure to pass from their ancestral lands, and how should they participate in this global project? Will everyone fight for their share, or will the Turkic countries work together? These questions are awaiting answers from the political and intellectual elite of the countries of the region.

The Great Silk Road has a special and important place in international relations with its historical past. It is known from today’s situation that this road, which began its history with silk, spices, and gunpowder, will be of special importance in the life of the Central Asian region today and in the future. In history and today, any project related to the Silk Road has passed, is passing and passes through the geography of Central Asian countries and other parts of Turkic World. In the far and recent history, the ancestors of today’s Central Asian peoples, especially the Turkic dynasties, played a major role in the successful functioning of the Central Asian region and were in constant political, economic and cultural relations with the Chinese civilization. During the prosperous times of the GSR, just like in our time, the Chinese civilization played the role of the “World factory”, and in Central Asia, the powerful states that ensured order and security ruled the GSR. In such historical periods, the economic-social, political-cultural relations between Western and Eastern civilizations continued being stable, and the Turkic civilization played a key role in this process.

Today, all of members Organization of Turkic States should show political and economic dexterity to various development scenarios on the Great Silk Road, especially in the implementation of the “One Belt, One Road” which was the initiative of the People’s Republic of China. It is also important to restore aspects related to intercultural communication. It should be emphasized that the successful implementation of the “One Belt, One Road” project is not possible only with China’s efforts. As the essence of the project lies in universal development, it is to involve all countries of the world and all interested participants in its realization. Therefore, all the countries located on the Great Silk Road, first of all, the post-Soviet countries of Central Asia, as well as the transit countries - Iran, Turkey, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Armenia, etc., should provide the necessary political and economic support to the project of reconstruction of new GSR. As it was in past, the new Silk Road should be a bridge of communication and create peace between cultures, peoples and civilizations.

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