

ANNALS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CRAIOVA

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ANALELE  
UNIVERSITĂȚII  
DIN CRAIOVA

ISTORIE / HISTORY

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Bi-Annually Journal

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Year XXVI, No. 2(40)/2021

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November

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The Journal is published bi-annually.

There is no charge for publishing articles.

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This issue is archived in the legal depository of the National Library of Romania and University of Craiova.

Prezentul număr este arhivat în depozitul legal al Bibliotecii Naționale a României și al Universității din Craiova.

ISSN – L: 1224 – 5704

ISSN Online: 2393 – 3682

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Analele Universității din Craiova. Istorie (Annals of the University of Craiova. History) is indexed in:

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## THE SILK ROAD AND BUSINESS COMMUNICATIONS IN THE ANCIENT EAST

*Arman A. Kudabay\**, *Gulnar K. Mukanova\*\**, *Vladimir A. Yanchuk\*\*\**

10.52846/AUCSI.2021.2.01

### **Abstract**

In the modern world, which is striving for globalization and an increase in the number of means of communication, many researchers return to the history of the Great Silk Road as a means of transcontinental communication of peoples, countries, and economies. Since the end of the XX and at the beginning of the XXI century, new projects have been developed to "restoration" this path with the help of modern means and methods, in the context of understanding the new international economy. The relevance of the research is due to the need to turn to the beginning of the formation of this path, to its origins and understand how intercultural business communications were built in ancient times. The purpose of this study is to consider the process of establishing business ties between Ancient East countries. To determine the role of the participating countries, a historical and geographical approach was used. The chronological method is the leading research method of this problem, which allows us to trace the relationship between the causes and consequences of certain actions aimed at the construction and participation of countries in trade; the comparative, retrospective and analytical methods are also involved. These methods allow us to comprehensively consider how business ties were formed in the Ancient East. The article examines which peoples and empires were involved in the development of this ancient way, reveals what goals and methods were, and how the Great Silk Road influenced their development, both economically, culturally, and politically. In addition, the article reveals the role and participation of the peoples of modern Kazakhstan in the implementation of international trade in the Ancient East, and what prospects open up due to the development of new projects to restore this international communication. The study shows a comprehensive and chronological view of the formation of business communication in several countries involved in business relations in the region.

**Key words:** *The Great Silk Road, business relations, Kazakhstan, the Ancient East, transnational trade*

### **Introduction**

In recent years, modern economic trends require not only the development of new concepts but are increasingly turning to the experience of past generations. However, the study of global socio-economic relationships most often takes place on the materials of the history of modern times. The history of the economy of more ancient epochs remains the prerogative of national-oriented approaches. As a

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result, many phenomena of the early history of the world economy remain without deep analysis or are analysed rather one-sidedly (Latov, 2010: 131). One of such phenomena is the Great Silk Road, a system of caravan trade routes that connected the countries of Eurasia into a relatively unified economic system from the II century BC to the XV century. The Great Silk Road is a landmark familiar to many from history, tourists come to the most famous places of this path, but this object is not only a kind of historical heritage for modern researchers but also a subject for inspiration in the implementation of new economic projects. The legendary highway of the Middle Ages – the Great Silk Road – is the subject of both modern historical and economic and cultural studies, the 1500-year history of the route is a world cultural and economic miracle (Zhyllankozova, 2018: 549). Thanks to the Great Silk Road, the East and the West met: routes were laid, infrastructure was provided, using primitive transport, it was possible to unite the Eurasian continent, establishing trade exchange between the West and the East. But this through route connected all the great civilizations of the Old World – China, India, the Middle East and the Middle East, and Europe. One of the branches of the famous trade route passed through the regions of Kazakhstan, so the article will pay attention, among others, to the role of the peoples of modern Kazakhstan in trade. Currently, logistics, international trade and tourism are the main factors of integration of these countries (Raimbekov et al., 2018: 128-129).

Thus, the purpose of the study is to analyse the emergence and development of the Great Silk Road in the context of business ties in the region. The object of the research is the historical and economic processes of the formation of business relations of the Great Silk Road in the Ancient East. The chronological framework of the study is because many intercultural ties were laid during the Ancient East, which later either continued to develop or fell into decline.

The history of the Great Silk Road has been studied for more than one decade, archaeologists have been involved in the study of this phenomenon, whose research allows us to imagine the appearance of those societies that allowed trade to exist and develop (Nazarov & Korableva, 2018: 121-122). The role of the Great Silk Road in the economies of participants in this trade, as well as in the transnational trade, has long magnetized researchers of various periods, regions, and branches of science. There are some large and complex studies in the literature concerning the entire period of the existence of this path, for example, a book by Professor Valerie Hansen of Yale University is one of the best works on this topic (Hansen, 2015). Many works reveal the participation of the Greeks and Romans in the formation and development of the region, thanks to which the stereotype was destroyed of the strong role of Western peoples in the formation and development of this path (Speidel & von Reden, 2020: 703-704). Each country that participated in trade along this ancient route explores its contribution, for example, China is actively engaged in the history of the creation of the Great Silk Road, which owns the primacy in construction and the initiative to create it, although the prerequisites and the first caravan routes existed as early as the 3rd millennium BC in the region (Mamleeva, 1999: 189). Many studies involve attempts to restore this path using modern methods and modern approaches in international trade (Li & Huang, 2019: 3131). Recent studies analyse the potential

for the return of trade and business ties along the "old" path, analyse the prospects and opportunities for each participating country and the whole region (Raimbekov et al. 2018: 133). At the same time, researchers try to take a new look at the economic and cultural relations that were formed in the ancient period and how they have been developing in recent decades (Kushanova, 2020: 9). The recent initiatives of the leading regional countries, for example, the People's Republic of China, forces other countries to turn their eyes to the economic and business history of Central Asia, thus, the relevance of the article is due to the need for a deep and comprehensive analysis of business ties along the Great Silk Road, the issue of their formation and development. Based on all the above, the novelty of this article is due to the fact that it attempts a comprehensive analysis of the tasks and problems of establishing business and economic ties in a specific period, involving the experience of various regions that participated in these trade relations.

### **Materials and Methods**

The importance of the Great Silk Road was not only in ensuring trade and economic ties, thanks to which cultural, scientific and diplomatic contacts were established. The path that originally appeared as a commercial one very soon became the most important factor in the technical, scientific and spiritual progress of mankind, there was a cultural rapprochement and the establishment of ties between representatives of different tribes and peoples. The study of such an ancient period in the sense of economic and business communications can be successful when using numerous theoretical methods and interdisciplinary approaches. The study uses the historical and geographical approach, which allows us to take into account the peculiarities of the region not only in the natural and climatic context, but also in the historical and political because the lifelines of existing empires were constantly changing, one empire was dying, and a new state appeared in its place, which naturally influenced the methods and goals of trade operations in the East. For the implementation of research tasks, theoretical methods were used in this way such as analysis, synthesis, and systematisation of information. In addition, a problematic method was used to identify the main features of trade routes in ancient times, as well as those of trade and business ties in this region. The comparative method will allow us to assess how strongly business ties developed in the period of antiquity, at what stage they were during the Middle Ages and what connections have been preserved to this day. Naturally, it is not about classical, caravan trade at the present stage, but old business ties transformed into a network of modern economic systems.

The retrospective method is an important one to study business communications in ancient times, that is, a method to study historical processes from the current state through a consistent return reconstruction of events and phenomena to the past. For example, this method allows us to note the peculiarities of the business culture of each of the peoples, we know that the Chinese differ in many features in conducting business negotiations and communications, so we can trace whether such features were inherent in this side since ancient times, or at what stage they were formed, how they influenced the conduct of trade in ancient times. Thus, it

is possible to trace the features of business communications for each party interested in trading.

The research was carried out in 3 stages, each of them used a historical and geographical approach, but different methods were used to achieve the necessary results and draw conclusions: at the first stage, a chronological sequence of the formation and development of trade routes was built, coinciding with the route of the Great Silk Road in ancient times. Within the same stage, the main actors, participants of trade were identified, during which period a particular people dominated; the second stage included an analysis of the features of the formation and functioning of trade and business ties, the analysis included the features of geographical and political factors; the third stage was to assess the prospects for restoring the Great Silk Road within the modern global economy and within the geopolitical interests of Asian countries, especially China and post-Soviet countries, for example, Kazakhstan. Thus, a step-by-step study using various methods allowed us to analyse the materials, build a chronological and problematic model of the development of business relations in the Ancient East in the region covering the Great Silk Road.

### **Results and Discussion**

The Great Silk Road has more than one thousand years of its existence. Of course, none of his contemporaries called it using its well-known name at that time, the path received its name in 1877 from Ferdinand von Richthofen, who described the network of caravan routes in this way. For residents, it was just a trade route, or rather a fairly extensive network of trade communications. References to trade along the route that corresponds to the Silk Road can be found even in the Elamites who held trade between Mesopotamia and the cultural centres of the Indus Valley in the IV - III thousand BC and created an extensive network of communications in the Middle East with a system of nodal proto-urban and early urban centres (Mamleeva, 1999: 121). The routes were used by immigrants who migrated for better living conditions, local trade relations were probably established, but trade along the Asia-Europe route did not yet play a significant role.

Numismatics clearly proves the predominant role of Persia in trade on the Silk Road. The Royal Road, created under the Achaemenids (500-330 BC), was probably the main artery of trade at that time. The most important role was played by the Iranian people, known as the Sogdians, who lived in the city-states located on the territory of modern Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, and which approximately between 500 and 1000 years the routes of the Great Silk Road (Andrea, 2014: 111). The situation changed closer to our era with Alexander the Great's campaigns to the East. According to the original plan, the campaigns were supposed to secure the predominance of the free spirit of the Greeks over the slave psychology of the Asians. In reality, the policy of the young commander was very different from the original goals. The creation of a huge state that united the peoples of both western and eastern socio-cultural types within its borders was almost the only attempt in history to reconcile the West and the East as two different ways of life and worldviews. Even if the short experience of the neighbourhood of different peoples within a single political system, from the Balkans and Egypt to Central Asia and



Northern India, could not but affect the genesis of trade relations between the remote regions of the empire. During the time of Alexander and under his successors, trade received a powerful boost in the Hellenistic and Greco-Bactrian states (Mamleeva, 1999: 58-59). The old ties of Eastern societies revived, new caravan routes with Europe appeared, thus, the creation of the Macedonian empire is reflected in the fate of the Great Silk Road.

The inhabitants of the historical region called Sogdiana, known as one of the oldest centres of civilization, located around the famous city of Samarkand, known since 329 BC as Marakand, on the territory of modern Uzbekistan, are particularly distinguished among the numerous creators of the culture of the Great Silk Road. China considers itself the creator and the main actor of trade along this path, however, as we managed to find out, all the peoples who lived nearby took part in the trade, who can now consider themselves citizens of India, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and other eastern countries. However, China quickly realized the benefits of creating fortified and secure trade routes to invite foreign goods, so the government that controlled this route created favourable and safe conditions for trade, having considerable authority during the existence of this state (Wang, 2019: 17). It is proved that two external trade routes, land and sea, had a very important impact on the economy of the empire from the Han Dynasty to the Yuan Dynasty. Thus, from that moment the path became officially trans-Eurasian since it united only the peoples of the East in early times. Modern researchers have long moved away from the Eurocentric point of view on the purpose of a trade route, first Greece, and then the Roman Empire was the main partner of the east for a long time. Thanks to numerous studies, it became clear that the east traded within itself, large and small eastern states traded among themselves, however, goods from Europe were often found on its paths. Thanks to the impulse, the development and flourishing began of such cities as Bukhara, Samarkand, Merv, Sary Urganj and Khiva, which became known as the cultural centers of their time. Trade, crafts, social and political life, cultural ties and centres of knowledge flourished here. Such economic and cultural centres began to be called centres of communication, continuing the ancient tradition of the Great Silk Road, connecting various countries of the vast Muslim East, West and East, North and South. Historians and travellers of that time wrote various works in Arabic, Persian and Turkic languages, colourfully describing the cultural life of scientists, poets, writers and various cultural figures in the cities of Central Asia (Kushanova, 2020: 8). Up to the XIV century, the Great Silk Road retained its importance in the development of socio-cultural, political and economic ties. But it lost its position with the development of sea trade routes (Zhylankozova, 2018: 553). In this section, we would like to draw attention to the functional peculiarities of the path in ancient times, answer questions about the goals and scope, reveal the name and functions that this path performed in ancient times.

Let us start with the most important thing – with the name. As already noted, the Silk Road was not accidental, indeed, silk was often sold on the way from China to Europe. Researchers found silk in earlier times, so this material has a fairly long import history. However, since it was a network of branched trade routes, each direction could get a special name. In parallel with the silk road, there were a "lapis

lazuli" and a "jade" road in ancient times. Khotan jade has played an important role in the culture of China since the Neolithic period and was used mainly to manufacture ritual and magical objects (Mamleeva, 1999: 145). Thus, the path served for religious and spiritual needs of the population living along this road. Researchers note that it was often necessary to pay either with grain, which was easily damaged or with skeins of silk due to the lack of a bronze coin (Hansen, 2015: 47-49).

Thus, for some time, silk was not so much the main imported commodity, which determined the appearance of the road itself, but was also a kind of monetary equivalent. The natural factor was an important factor that influenced the intensity of trade relations influenced by dried-up rivers and reservoirs, and climate change. We can call the Great Migration of peoples in the 4-5 centuries AD the most famous climatic change that affected the political map and the migration of the population. The conflict between the Romans and the Parthians can be cited as an example of a geopolitical change in routes. Merchants from the Roman Empire tried to avoid crossing the territory of the Parthians, enemies of Rome, and therefore instead chose routes to the north, across the Caucasus region and the Caspian Sea. The peculiarity of this path was that in fact, it was not a certain trampled and noticeable path for years, along which crowds of merchants, pilgrims, travellers and so on walked. Rather, it was an extensive network of routes, however, two main routes can be distinguished connecting East and West: - the southern road-from the north of China through Central Asia to Northern India and the Middle East; - the northern road-from the north of China through the Pamirs and the Aral Sea to the Lower Volga and the Black Sea basin (Graf, 2018: 447). The presence of business and trade ties in the region contributed to building cities, and, thus, the emergence of proto-state entities. The ancient city of Merv is a striking example of a city that owed its appearance to trade and was the largest city on the Silk Road due to its ancient traditions and geographical convenience of connecting caravan routes in different directions. In addition to the local religion of the Zoroastrian temples, Merv was a pillar of the Buddhist and Byzantine Christian of India. The city flourished at the same time when trade flourished along the caravan route (Kushanova, 2020: 9). According to many researchers, it was thanks to the spread of spiritual values, scientific and technological knowledge, religions and cultures that large trading cities appeared along all its routes (Voevoda, 2010: 69-70).

Along the way, it was necessary to ensure safety and a place of rest, often, depending on the beliefs spread in the region where a particular route took place, religious buildings were built. For traders, pilgrims, missionaries, soldiers, diplomats and others who either left the hinterland of China or returned to it, the Buddhist cave complex and its associated monasteries outside Dunhuang were places of rest, and for those who accepted the Law of the Buddha, cave sanctuaries were a source of spiritual comfort, as they either prayed for a safe journey or offered prayers of gratitude for their safe return (Andrea, 2014: 118). Thus, we can note another function that the Silk Road began to perform – the recreational one, which resulted in the tourist function. It should also be noted that there was also a sea route in addition to the well-known land Silk Road. India played an important role in the sea route, more and more goods were delivered to the West by sea, and not by land. The main sea routes of the Silk

Road passed between Indian ports, and those of the Middle East, on the Arabian Sea and the Red Sea. From the Middle East, goods were delivered by land to the Mediterranean Sea, and then to Europe. From India, goods went to Southeast Asia, the East Indies and China and back (Mishra, 2020: 37).

In the Ancient East, business relations represented a completely different type of communication. Initially, of course, there were no embassies or delegations that would perform the function of intermediaries in the communication of the authorities of two or more states. The variety of commercial activities was also limited due to the insignificance of the delegations – for example, two envoys were sent to Sogdiana in 52 BC, accompanied by ten representatives of the nobility, and only the delegations could be more than 1000 people in exceptional cases. Starting from the earliest time, it is not possible to draw a clear line between official trade, which was carried out by special envoys who brought gifts and returned with gifts in return for their ruler, and private commercial operations (Hansen, 2015: 23).

Thus, business connections were diverse, most of them were represented by private merchants. When states, for example, China, were going through a period of centralisation, attempts were often made to introduce control over the flow of merchants. During the reign of the Wei Dynasty in the III century AD the influx of foreign merchants to the capital forced the administration to take some measures. Each merchant was required to obtain a passport-permit, which indicated the name, the country from where the merchant came, the destination, the goods being transported, as well as a list of accompanying persons. It is well known that the communities of tribes and peoples living along the Silk Road specialised mainly in agricultural production, and not in commerce, as should be assumed, that is, the vast majority of the population were farmers and were not engaged in trade. Trade became necessary during periods of migration and wars. Due to migration processes, cultures interacted, population flows transferred beliefs. Thus, Buddhism, Zoroastrianism and many other Eastern beliefs and religions were spread by the population living along the Silk Road (Nazarov & Korableva, 2018: 128). The large length of the route and the intensive trade turnover of that time allow us to assume the presence of intermediate caravanserais with provisions and restrooms (hujras) for caravans, domes over reservoirs (sardoba), fodder for camels, horses, mules and donkeys. In such places, a merchant could sell or change his goods, get the necessary information for himself, hire translators and local nomadic pastoralists who, over the many years of servicing caravans, learned to professionally perform the functions of guides and food suppliers (Koltsov et al., 2015: 31). People of many professions worked for the maintenance of trade caravans – translators, money changers, camel drivers, caravan guards, tax collectors and others.

The Silk Road contributed to the development of not only trade itself but also many institutions of the "rules of the game" of the market economy, an international division of labour arose (Latov, 2010: 139). It is quite obvious that the system of the Silk Road was the result of centuries of accumulated experience of exchange and trade contacts between representatives of settled and pastoral peoples, along its entire length from west to east. The peoples of the steppe spaces of Eurasia, undoubtedly, took part in this, since one of the trade routes from Ferghana

led to the Urals and the Volga region through the Kazakh steppes in the period no later than the II millennium BC (Mamleeva, 1999: 75). Thus, it is worth noting the influence of both the above-mentioned peoples, such as the Sogdians, Chinese, Persians and the peoples living in the steppes of modern Kazakhstan. Settlements developed intensively along the caravan route, there was a rapid formation and development of crafts in the Turkic peoples, various technologies for the production of goods were developed, trade turnover increased, trade relations developed. Trade routes across the territory of Kazakhstan contributed to the creation and development of such trade hubs as Ispidzhab (Sairam), Farab (Otrar) and Khurlug (Shymkent), Yasy (Turkestan), etc. The city culture was formed, trade and business international socio-economic and political relations were actively established. It is important to note that the cultural foundations were also formed for the development of the peoples inhabiting the territory of Kazakhstan.

Every nation that participated in trade and relations along the Great Silk Road made a certain and significant contribution. The expansion of the habitat is the main value that the Kazakh people and their ancestors brought to the world civilisation, thanks to the nomadic lifestyle of many tribes, the development of desert and semi-desert lands took place. Some researchers and historians note the contribution of nomadic tribes as those who accelerated the movement of history, for example, as A. Weber wrote, their migration processes caused the formation of new civilizations. The early Turks, and then their descendants, played the role of a leading link between the West and the East, the Great Silk Road, and other communication routes, and they were the reason for their communication (Tursynbayeva et al., 2015: 33). Therefore, the point of view is not without prejudice that represents ancient trade in the form of only dependent and hostile relations of foreign merchants with local authorities. The main meaning of the Silk Road is the beginning of the end of the perception of a foreigner in the usual guise of an enemy and invader, and the birth of a new image – a foreign merchant. He continued to be the same "stranger", "gentile" and "alien", but communication with whom could promise no fewer benefits.

Involved in the global orbit of the search for a universal model of multinational and multi-confessional interaction, Kazakhstan has today become the author of its model of a tolerant and harmonious society recognised in the world community, and the country has laid the foundation for further improvement of public relations based on civil peace and harmony (Baltabayeva & Rizakhojayeva, 2018: 98-99).

As noted earlier, interest increased in this ancient trade route at the end of the XX century. The initiator was the People's Republic of China, which for several decades has been developing projects to restore these paths within the framework of modern economic and international trends. In 2013, China officially introduced the "Belt and Road" concept, in which the Silk Road economic belt and the maritime Silk Road are considered as important areas for external exchanges, economic development and opening up a new situation. This is not only the embodiment of China's economic development in a new era, but also the embodiment of its new needs and aspirations for economic development (Wang, 2019: 17). The Silk Road was the point of interaction of the Turkic people. Since a significant part of the Great Silk Road ran through Central Asia, the prestige of Eastern culture was very high at that