

Great Silk Road on the Territory of Kazakhstan: From Past to Future

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Abstract: The Great Silk Road is a trade route linking the East and West which gave impetus to the development of ancient society, and Kazakhstan is the heart of the trade route. At the initial stage, intensive transaction of goods took place between the West and East through The Great Silk Road. This paper reviewed the history of development of the Silk Road and suggested that today to construct the “New Silk Road”, Kazakhstan should face many issues, and take many steps to become a Eurasian hub through taking full of advantages. Above all, developing mechanisms of integration and sustainable development is our urgent need.

Key words: Great Silk Road; Kazakhstan; history; construction measures

The Great Silk Road (GSR) is a trade route linking the East and West, the place of contact of cultures, knowledge, and civilization. It was a too thin thread for interpenetration of cultures, but owing to it, people learned to understand each other better, to be more tolerant of other people's values. It allowed accumulating knowledge, which gave additional impetus to the development of ancient society and in its way was the bridge for the intensive exchange of information and knowledge (Fig. 1).

Large nomadic unions turned into the great nomadic civilizations, namely on the territories through which the Great Silk Road passed, and the intensity commodities exchange was to a considerable extent associated with their formation and development. Thus, in the initial period it were the Turkic and Turgesh khanates, then the state of Chenghis Khan, at a later time — Mawarannahr ruled by Timur. The rise and prosperity of these countries has been closely connected with the Great Silk Road. However, with the development of maritime trade the value of the Great Silk Road sank into oblivion.

Merit in the opening of the Silk Road belongs to ZHANG

Jiang, a secret service man and diplomat, who opened Western Region — countries of Central Asia (Danvan, Kangju, Sogdiana and Bactria) in the second half of the II century BC for the Chinese. The opposite way, which runs between Europe and Asia, was made possible due to the conquests of Alexander Makedonsky. Thus, countries and cities of Central Asia became a place of trade contacts, contiguity of cultures, exchange of information, i.e. ancient global Hub. They controlled almost all trade routes from the West to the East, along which mainly goods travelled, which were transferred several times from hand to hand before they got to the end consumer.

At the initial stage of development of the Silk Road, the Chinese received highly valuable horses, as well as seeds of alfalfa and planting grapes from Central Asia. Ancient world cultivated grapevine and produced wine from ancient times. Grape was a novelty for the Chinese, especially isolated from other civilizations. Moreover, the Chinese envoys were extremely surprised that wine could be done not from rice, but from those unknown to them berries. Later, the Chinese had mastered a few other crops, such as haricots, onions,

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Fig. 1 The Great Silk Road.

cucumbers, carrots, pomegranates, Circassian walnuts, figs and others, due to caravan trade.

Various woolen products — carpets, curtains, bedspreads, whole-floor carpets — came to China from Central Asia and the Eastern Mediterranean region. They made a great impression on the Chinese, who were unfamiliar with the technique of processing of wool, linen, carpet manufacturing and carpet weaving. The Parthian tapestry fabrics and carpets were highly valued in ancient China.

Camels, military equipment, gold and silver, semiprecious stones and glassware, very valued in China, were exported from Central Asia. Samarkand glass was especially valued for its high quality. Earlier, it was considered as a luxury. Also leather and wool, cotton fabrics, golden-embroidered fabrics, exotic fruits — watermelons, melons and peaches, fat-tailed sheep and hunting dogs, leopards and lions were exported.

As for exporting from China, caravans took to the West the famous chinaware — vases, bowls, glasses, dishes, which were snow-white with elegant designs. The secret of making the finest and ringing chinaware was known only in China, so it was very expensive on the European markets. Bronze adornments and other products from these metal, bronze mirrors with various ornaments, umbrellas, products from famous Chinese lacquer, medicines, and perfumes were also exported. Chinese paper — one of the greatest inventions of the Chinese technical genius — was also highly valued. Gold, leather and many other products were export items. Merchants also carried tea and rice, woolen cloth and linen, coral, amber, asbestos. Elephant tusks, rhinoceros horns, tortoise shells, spices, products from ceramics and iron, icing and cinnamon, ginger, bronze weapons and mirrors could be found in the road bags of the

merchants.

Fabrics, spices and gems, dyes, ivory were delivered from India. Silverware was delivered from Iran. Spices, incense, precious stones, ivory, sugar was carried to Rome. European paintings and luxuries were delivered thence.

Rice, cotton, woolen and silk fabrics were delivered to Eastern Europe from Central Asia. Large amount of leathers, furs, fur-bearing animals, bark for tanning leather, cattle and slaves were brought from Eastern Europe to Khorezm. In addition to furs and leathers, honey and slaves were carried from Northern Europe.

As we can observe, the lion's share of commodity turnover on the Silk Road came to the Oriental countries, as for the Europe, goods were mainly imported to there. The territory of Central Asia today, same as in ancient times, represents a big market of sales and production of finished products. Currently, over three billion people live on the adjacent to the Great Silk Road territory. Development of overland transport and logistics would allow to significantly expanding the product markets for all participants in international trade by reducing transportation and logistics costs, thereafter, it would allow decline in prices for consumer products.

Over a thousand years the existence of the Great Silk Road in the vast area played a huge role in the development of individual countries and peoples, as well as human civilization. In the 21st century, the restoration of traditions of the GSR in accordance with unique for its geopolitical significance and scales changes in the world have acquired relevance. The processes of globalization dictate new paradigms for international cooperation within a single world economic system. Integration processes significantly reduce administrative and economic barriers on the path

of movement of goods, services and information, make the direct maritime transportation within a single continent ineffective. The revival of the Great Silk Road is not only efficient routes for prompt delivery of goods, it is, above all, new product markets, new opportunities for inter-branch and production integration, development of transportation and logistics and recreational complexes, as well as intense cultural, scientific and technological exchange.

Kazakhstan was the heart of the ancient trade route and it attaches a great importance to the participation in the implementation of projects on the revival of the Great Silk Road. There are two approaches to the development of the Silk Road: limited—organization of transport and logistics corridor, and comprehensive—organization of transportation and logistics, financial and, possibly, industrial hub.

Unfortunately today, the main efforts of our state are aimed at the development of transportation and logistics corridor, whereas a comprehensive approach to the organization of the GSR is declared. This requires clarification of the basic concepts. Transportation and logistics corridor involves the building of a system for the efficient movement of transit commodity flows, information and finances, at the same time, it does not exclude the parallel development of recreational and industrial systems and is mainly related to economic benefits. Transportation and logistics hub involves the building of a big center of international trade, information and finance on the territory of Kazakhstan, which will be closely interrelated, and will propose a high level of cultural, scientific, information exchange, as well as obtaining certain social benefits. In this context, I would like to give an example of a major trade center, in the depth of which we can not only purchase goods from all over the world, but also arrange loans for the purchase of goods (banking services), organize leisure activity (recreational services), meet different household needs (services — hairdressing, dry-cleaning, small repairs, etc.). It means that people go to such trade centers not only for the purchase of goods, but also for the opportunity to meet all their needs. A hub within the scope of a country is such a center which regulates international trade and minimizes logistics costs (Fig. 2). There is a Maritime Hub between West and East in the United Arab Emirates, so why not to create an overland Hub between Asia and Europe in Kazakhstan?

In order to turn Kazakhstan into Eurasian hub, it is necessary not only to create conditions for their technical realization (infrastructure), but also to create economic and political conditions for reorientation of the direction of trade flows. If we consider the historical parallels, Emir Timur managed to redirect the caravan routes from Urgench to Samarkand by creating strong alliances, stable state and a series of campaigns of conquest, which were the beginning of the end of the Golden Horde. In this case, the political factor was decisive, lowering the risks on the travel line of the goods.

Today, same as in ancient times, the main trade flows are tied to China, and the economic interests of China are focused on Central Asia, therefore it is necessary for Kazakhstan just properly evaluate the political and economic priorities for the country.

Political measures should be aimed at reducing administrative barriers in the path of commodity flows and minimizing the risks to international trade. Great political transparency, tolerance and political culture of the society can serve as a good basis of Kazakhstan’s transformation into one of the main centers of the international movement of goods, services and capital. In practice this means that the political situation should be favorable, stable and predictable, and access for non-residents to the country should be free.

Economic policy should encourage cheaper modes of transportation and trade in comparison with competitors’ ones, in our case, with the United Arab Emirates. This means the creation of special economic zones for the free movement of goods, services and other material assets. However, turning the country into a full-fledged Hub requires liberal policy in the field of taxation, which should be agreed with the systems of taxation of the partner countries, that will allow to avoid double taxation on products. Of course, in order to revive commodity turnover on the Great Silk Road, it is necessary to follow the established rules of international trade, i.e. to join the World Trade Organization.

Investments into large infrastructure projects, work on which is already active, are necessary besides the political and economic measures. In the framework of the “New Silk Road” (NSR) initiative two main trends of development in Kazakhstan are formed. One of them is new paradigms of geospatial development for the “NSR” corridors. This trend includes the following activities: implementation of the project and a comprehensive action plan for the “New Silk Road” for 2012–2020 (“Western Europe-Western China” transportation and logistics infrastructure); the

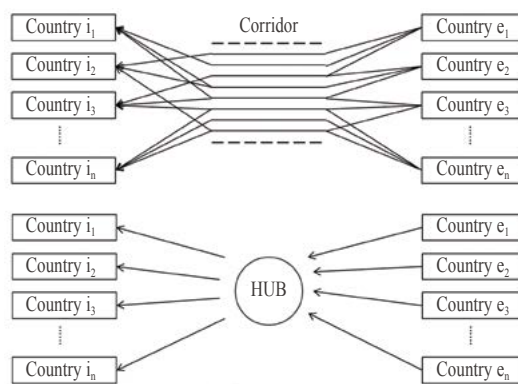


Fig. 2 Scheme of international trade: direct and through the hub.

accelerated industrial and innovative development and “Map of industrialization” of Kazakhstan in the context of the “New Silk Road”; the general scheme of the organization of the territory of Kazakhstan in the context of the “New Silk Road”; development of tourist infrastructures and services in the context of the “New Silk Road”.

As a part of the second trend, the following urgent problems of the development of the “NSR” initiative will be solved: enhancing of international cooperation and scientific researches in the context of the development of the “New Silk Road”; carrying out comprehensive scientific and applied researches on the “New Silk Road” corridors — “nature, economy, culture, tourism”; the assessment of the characteristics of modern economic process and the analysis of the relationship of the processes of globalization of economic relations and integration formations; a prospective evaluation of the development of the territory along the “New Silk Road” corridors; the development of mechanisms of integration and sustainable development on the territory of the “New Silk Road”; the improvement of the normative legal framework for the development of the “New Silk Road”.

Geographical location of Kazakhstan, the richness and diversity of natural resources, low population density and territorial isolation of industrial centers determine the special role of transport in the economy of the country. The transport industry is represented by: railway, other overland (car, truck, bus, taxi, tram, trolleybus), air, pipeline and river modes of transport, motor roads and railways, and also navigable waterways (Iskakov *et al.* 2010). According to the data of the Statistics Agency of the Republic of Kazakhstan (RK) on January 1, 2013, public transport network consisted of 15.3 thousand km of railways; 97.4 thousand km of roads; 4.2 thousand km of internal navigable waterways; 273.5 km of trolleybus, tram and subway tracks; 20.2 thousand km of trunk pipelines. The volume of cargo transportation by all modes of transport in 2013 in view of commercial transportation by individual entrepreneurs was 3 497.9 million tons. Transportation of passengers in 2013 amounted to 20 001.5 million people in view of commercial transportation by individual entrepreneurs (<http://www.stat.gov.kz>).

The XXV plenary session of Foreign Investors Council under the President of the RK on the topic “Kazakhstan is an international trade, logistics, business and financial hub” was held on May 22, 2012 in Astana under the chairmanship of the country’s President Nursultan Nazarbayev. On it, president Nazarbayev suggested to foreign investors to implement the “New Silk Road” project in Kazakhstan for the integration of the countries of Europe and Asia, development of transport and logistics infrastructure and creation of ample opportunities for effective trade and exchange. He said the following: “Kazakhstan should revive its historical role and become a major business transit hub of the Central Asian region, in its own way a

bridge between Europe and Asia. It is the creation of a unified complex of hubs of international level — trade and logistics, financial and business, innovation-technological and touristic — in key transport corridors of Kazakhstan. The results of the implementation of this mega-project by 2020 are as follows — the volume of transit cargo traffic through Kazakhstan should increase 2 times with further bringing it up to minimum 50 million tons.” (The official website of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Kazakhstan Karim Massimov 2013). In order to implement the orders of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the “Comprehensive Action Plan for the implementation of the project New Silk Road” was approved by the decree of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Kazakhstan in January 2013. The President of the People’s Republic of China Xi Jinping in the course of his official visit to Kazakhstan on September 6–8, 2013 pointed out that 3 billion people live in the area of the “Silk Road”, and the local market is unique for its scales and potential. He appealed the appropriate parties to remove barriers for facilitating trade and investment activities and to create “Economic Corridor of the Silk Road” for China and Kazakhstan (The Astana Times 2013).

Modern system of population distribution is connected with the ancient routes of the Great Silk Road on the territory of Kazakhstan. Kazakhstan, which occupies a vast territory of 2724.9 thousand km², is at the same time a sparsely populated country (Iskakov *et al.* 2010). Population size as of March 1, 2014 amounted for 17 207 thousand people, and the average density of population was 6.3 people km⁻². Density of rural population in Kazakhstan as of January 1, 2014 amounted to 2.8 people km⁻² on average. In general, extremely uneven distribution of the population is characteristic. Up to 46.9 % of the population of the country lives in the Southern natural-economic region, of which: 15.9 % — in South Kazakhstan region, 11.6 % — in Almaty region, 6.3 % — in Zhambyl region, 4.3 % — in Kyzylorda region, 8.8 % — in the city of Almaty. Most densely populated territory of passage of the Great Silk Road is South Kazakhstan region with a population density of 22.4 people km⁻², the least populated is Aktope region with population density of 2.6 people km⁻². As of January 1, 2014 up to 44.9 % of the country’s population lived in rural areas, the remaining 55.1 % — in cities and towns (<http://www.stat.gov.kz>). The modern capital of Kazakhstan -Astana, as well as such cities as Almaty, Taraz, Shymkent and others are located on ancient pathways of the Great Silk Road.

Recreational potential of our country is just being disclosed. Kazakhstan is a country with amazing nature, unique culture and rich historical past, so different kinds of recreation and tourism got development here. The most popular attractions include: national nature parks, the Mausoleum of Khoja Ahmed Yasawi, Medeu and Shymbulak, Kolsai Lakes, Kiin-Kerish tract, Otrar Oasis,

underground mosque Becket-ata, Sarayshyk ancient settlement, Karaganda work camp Dolinka and others. On March 7, 2013, the World Economic Forum (WEF) published the "Report on Competitiveness in the sphere of tourism and travel for 2013". According to the Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index, Kazakhstan took 88 places in the rating of 2013 (for comparison: in 2011 it took 93rd place). Kazakhstan improved its position in almost all indicators. The greatest changes were recorded for the indicators of "Price competitiveness" (+19) and "Quality of ground infrastructure" (+16). For the "Natural resources" indicator the rating of the country dropped by 13 positions, for the "Infrastructure of tourism" — by 6 positions. Total 24 indicators were identified as competitive advantages of Kazakhstan. Among them there are the following: "Health and hygiene" (3rd place), "The infrastructure of information and communication technologies (ICT)" (48th place), "The cost of starting a business" (8th place), "The price of diesel fuel" (14th place) and others (Official website of the JSC "National Analytical Center" 2013).

To integrate all efforts on reviving the historical role and achievements of the Great Silk Road, the need in the implementation of the program of scientific and applied researches of the "Sustainable development of the "New Silk Road" corridors on the territories of Kazakhstan and China" is brewing. The objective of the program can be formulated as follows: to perform a comprehensive assessment of natural, socio-economic and environmental conditions on the territory of the passage of the "New Silk Road" corridors and to develop an outlook of their changes and an action system for long-term sustainable development. As part of this objective, the solution of a

number of tasks will be required.

Summarizing the overview of the new paradigms of geospatial development and initiatives for the "NSR" corridors on the territory of Kazakhstan, the main objective can be clearly determined as the urgent need in developing mechanisms of integration and sustainable development. Formation of the integration unity and cultural diversity along the route of the "New Silk Road" and the revival of a large continental overland Hub in a same way as it was in ancient times can be achieved by solving the following important tasks: sustainable and growing cooperation of the converging and intertwining production processes of economic entities; the formation of a new system quality of integration formations: ownership, management, mechanisms of economic management and investment; consistent regulation of the diversity of relations and leveling of socio-economic development and environmental safety.

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丝绸之路之哈萨克斯坦：从历史到未来

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摘要: 连接东西方的丝绸之路极大地促进了古代社会的发展。其中, 哈萨克斯坦是这条贸易路线的心脏地带。在初期, 东西方通过丝绸之路进行密切的商品交易。本文回顾了东西方之间通过丝绸之路进行贸易的历史, 指出了在今天为了建设“新丝绸之路”, 哈萨克斯坦需要面对的诸多问题, 以及为了发展成为欧亚间的枢纽而需要充分利用的自身优势和采取的措施。最后, 本文指出区域一体化发展和可持续发展是当下的迫切要求。

关键词: 丝绸之路; 哈萨克斯坦; 历史; 建设措施