

## THE GREAT SILK ROAD AS A FACTOR OF ECONOMIC AND CULTURAL COOPERATION



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**Annotation.** *This article analyzes the role of the Great Silk Road and its impact on the economic development of Central Asian countries. Particular attention is paid to the assessment from the perspective of transport logistics, which is crucial for Central Asian countries, and especially Uzbekistan, which lack direct transport links to global markets. The Great Silk Road creates all the conditions for the creation of transport corridors.*

**Key words:** *The Great Silk Road, regional security, regional cooperation, transport corridors*

## ВЕЛИКИЙ ШЕЛКОВОЙ ПУТЬ КАК ФАКТОР ЭКОНОМИЧЕСКОГО И КУЛЬТУРНОГО СОТРУДНИЧЕСТВА

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**Аннотация.** *Статья посвящена анализу роли Великой шелковой пути и ее влиянии на экономическое развитие стран региона Центральной Азии. Особое внимание уделена оценке с точки зрения транспортной логистике, которая имеет важное значение для стран Центральной Азии и, особенно, Узбекистану, не имеющих непосредственных транспортных артерий к мировым рынкам. Великий шелковый путь создает все условия для создания транспортных коридоров.*

**Ключевые слова:** Великий шелковый путь, региональная безопасность, региональное сотрудничество, транспортные коридоры

In the era of globalization, the relationship and economic integration between countries is of increasing importance. Any cooperation between countries is primarily based on economic and cultural foundations.

The countries of Central Asia, setting themselves the task of integration into the world community, turn their attention to the historical experience of interaction between peoples. One of such pages of history is the Great Silk Road, which is a cultural interaction and exchange between the peoples of the East and West.

Central Asia is located on the ancient Silk Road, and all countries in the region through which this route passed are striving to strengthen regional cooperation.

It is known that today there is a shift in economic relations from the West to the Asia-Pacific region, which is why there is a need to create transport arteries between these regions. Central Asia in the historical and cultural context was directly connected with China and plays an important role in the creation of new transport corridors.

Nowadays, interest in the history of the Silk Road increased in the early 1990s, when five Central Asian republics, through whose territories its main routes once passed, gained state independence. The idea of reviving the ancient highway as a major channel for deep international cooperation in the fields of diplomacy, culture, science, trade, and tourism arose.

Uzbekistan actively participates in projects dedicated to the revival of the Great Silk Road. After declaring independence on September 1, 1991, Uzbekistan entered a new stage in its history.

From the first days of the formation of the new state, the country's leadership began to pay great attention to the revival of the Great Silk Road. The Republic of Uzbekistan, together with the world community, is actively involved in the practical restoration of the Great Silk Road (projects for the construction and reconstruction of communication routes, tourism development, etc.). As noted by the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Karimov I.A., "the historical artery of life of the peoples of Central Asia - the Great Silk Road ... must be revived"[5].

The implementation of the project to revive the Silk Road has led to the fact that today this route and the countries through which it passed are studied by dozens of scientific centers and public organizations in the countries of Asia, Europe and America. They study the past, present, as well as the long-term prospects of the revived Silk Road, thereby erasing the "borders for cultural and scientific

cooperation", which is quite consistent with the idea of cultural synthesis on the Great Silk Road.

It is necessary to emphasize that the initiative put forward by the Chairman of the People's Republic of China Xi Jinping on the need to update the model of cooperation between China and the countries of Central Asia is very relevant. Continuing his thought, he noted that the economic corridor can be further strengthened by "political contacts, uniting roads, implementing free trade, implementing currency turnover and establishing friendship between the peoples of all countries in the region."

One of the factors determining the relevance of the initiative of the Chairman of the PRC is that the Central Asian region was the "heart" of the Great Silk Road, requiring a new review and rethinking of the history of relations between the states of the Great Silk Road. It is known that the Great Silk Road contributed not only to the rise of trade, but also to the flourishing of cities, irrigation systems, arts, crafts, mutual enrichment of cultures, languages, religions, and the formation of a common heritage of mankind.

As President of the People's Republic of China Xi Jinping notes, "Diplomatic relations with neighboring countries should create favorable conditions for the revival of the nation. He stands for deepening peaceful cooperation with neighbors, and in terms of economy, he promotes the ideas of the "maritime Silk Road" and the "economic belt of the new Silk Road". This approach is different from what was before, it is something completely new."

In turn, it is necessary to state the opinion of the Co-Director of the Al-Farabi Carnegie Project on Central Asia, American expert Martha Brill Olcott that "China decided to act preemptively. There have been few cases when the main politician of a great power could do so much in such a short time. As a result, China has pushed the United States and Russia out of the position of global players with the greatest influence in Central Asia"[8]. At the same time, drawing parallels between the leaders of the two countries, she points out that "not one of the US presidents has visited Central Asia."

A group of experts, analyzing China's foreign policy in Central Asia, argue that "China, as a great power, is a key factor in the foreign policy of Central Asian countries. It can play a positive role in balancing the influence of other great powers, which helps these countries maintain balance and conduct multilateral diplomacy. It does not seek hegemony or control; it does not bully small countries but treats them as equals; it does not interfere in their internal affairs and is always ready to resolve all issues through negotiations and in the spirit of fairness. This has

helped China create a positive image, which in turn is a valuable resource for its diplomacy"[11].

China adheres to three principles in relations with the Central Asian states: "be friends with neighbors", "give neighbors a sense of calm", "help neighbors get rich"[1], which will allow China to further strengthen its position in Central Asia in the future. Back in 1997, former US National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski included Central Asia in his book "China's zone of influence as a world power"[3].

Chris Johnson, a representative of the Center for Strategic and International Studies (USA), analyzing the visit of the Chairman of the People's Republic of China to Central Asia, gives a high assessment of the events, emphasizing that "China is making a rather bold move. Xi Jinping sees a huge gaping hole in terms of trade and economic opportunities that the United States of America has not yet been able to take advantage of"[2].

The economic growth of the PRC allows it to actively use financial instruments. In bilateral relations with countries in the region, the issue of using the yuan is being raised, which in the long term may not only contribute to the further economic growth of the PRC, but also to the strengthening of Beijing's position in the Central Asian region. The same policy, known as "Dollar Diplomacy", was launched by the United States after World War II, which, in turn, served as an impetus for rapid economic growth and the strengthening of this country's position on the global level.

The proposal of the Chairman of the PRC to create a SCO development bank based on Chinese capital during the SCO summit is proof of this. Unfortunately, some experts view this fact as "a desire to turn the Organization's institutions into a tool for China's expansion in the post-Soviet space"[4]. However, according to the Director of the Risk Assessment Group Dosym Satpayev, "unlike Russia, China not only declares a strategic partnership, but also pays for it in hard cash quickly and without bargaining"[10].

As Zeki Furkan Kucuk, a Master's student in Eurasian Studies at the Middle East Technical University (Turkey), marks, China does not view these Central Asian countries as its "backyard" like Russia, and does not use the term "big brother" to describe itself like Turkey. Nor does China try to establish military alliances with these republics based on the use of military bases, like the United States. Instead, China uses its economic power as a diplomatic weapon against other countries to implement its policies [7].

Therefore, as noted by Kazakhstan expert Kaukunov A., in many Central Asian countries China is considered a reliable and generous creditor that does not set conditions in the field of politics and in matters of democracy. For its part, the

PRC sets itself such tasks as "being a permanent participant in regional economic and political cooperation processes in Central Asia; protecting Central Asian countries from the expansion of the influence of the USA, NATO and other external players; expanding China's cultural presence in Central Asia as a necessary condition for becoming a superpower"[6].

If we compare the policies of the US and China in the Central Asian region, we can conclude that Washington aims to strengthen the region militarily, spending its financial savings accordingly, while Beijing's policy is aimed at ensuring the interests of the national economy. Based on these considerations, according to Western experts, China has repeatedly pointed out to the US the limitations of its geopolitical ambitions and even rejected the White House's initiative to create a "Big Two", an informal global axis of China-USA, which would undertake obligations to maintain stability in the world[9].

During his speech in Kazakhstan, Chinese President Xi Jinping put forward the following main areas of cooperation in order to strengthen further cooperation between the Central Asian countries and China:

First, the SCO member states should develop the "Shanghai spirit".

Second, they should jointly ensure peace and stability in the region, implement the Shanghai Convention on Combating Terrorism, Separatism and Extremism and the Cooperation Program on Combating Terrorism, Separatism and Extremism.

Third, the SCO member states should conduct business cooperation, develop the spirit of the Silk Road.

Fourth, they should intensify humanitarian exchanges and non-governmental contacts to strengthen the people's and society's foundations for the development of the SCO.

In conclusion, it can be noted that the Great Silk Road has undoubtedly played and will play a huge role in the development of not only the relations between the countries of Central Asia and China, but also in world civilization. The ineradicable desire for communication, for reasonable benefit and higher welfare has always prevailed over political and religious confrontation. Therefore, when creating a model of future relations between peoples and cooperation, it is necessary to use such a convincing example.

Although many experts disagree, the main facts agree on the following points: first, the initiative of Chinese President Xi Jinping is to restore historical ties. Second, while other world centers are setting themselves the task of geostrategic rivalry in the region, China is focusing on economic equal relations between the Central Asian countries. Third, the Central Asian countries are also interested in recreating the Great Silk Road, as they need to create alternative transport corridors



to access world markets. Fourth, this corridor can further strengthen not only economic, but also cultural and other ties between the Central Asian countries and China.

The history of the Great Silk Road is the history of extensive cultural interaction and exchange between the peoples of the East and West. It proves that only close cooperation and mutual enrichment of cultures are the basis for peace and progress for all mankind.

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