

Teaching on the Silk Roads: A Workshop for K-12 Educators



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Part I

The “Silk Road”

Present-day relevance

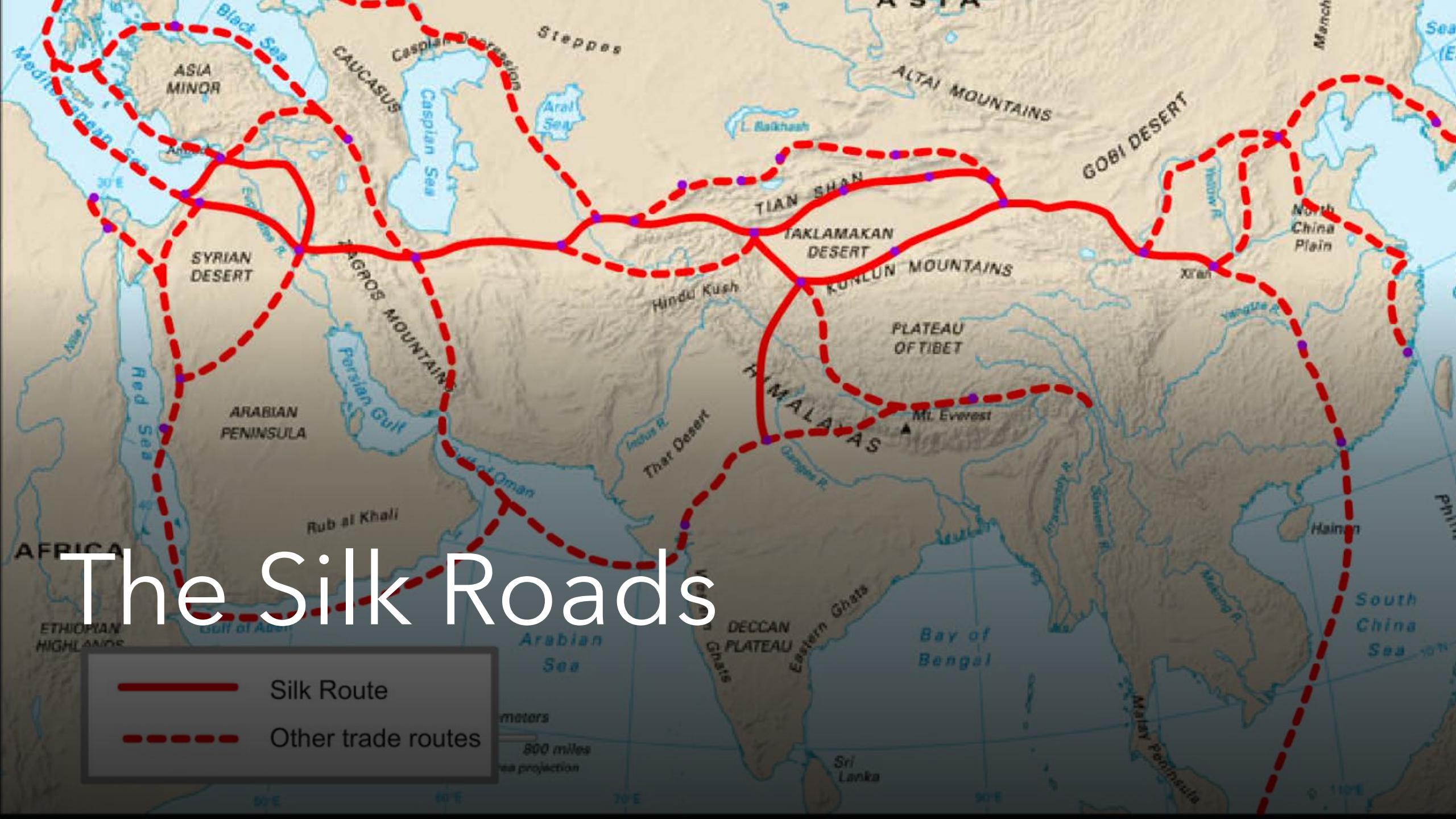
Preservation matters

Re-discovery of the Silk Roads

Dunhuang and the “library cave”

Buddhism beyond India

The Silk Roads







The New Silk Roads: “Belt and Road Initiative”



A cyclist passes by construction cranes in Xi'an, China, a starting point of the New Silk Road. Zhang Peng/LightRocket via Getty Images



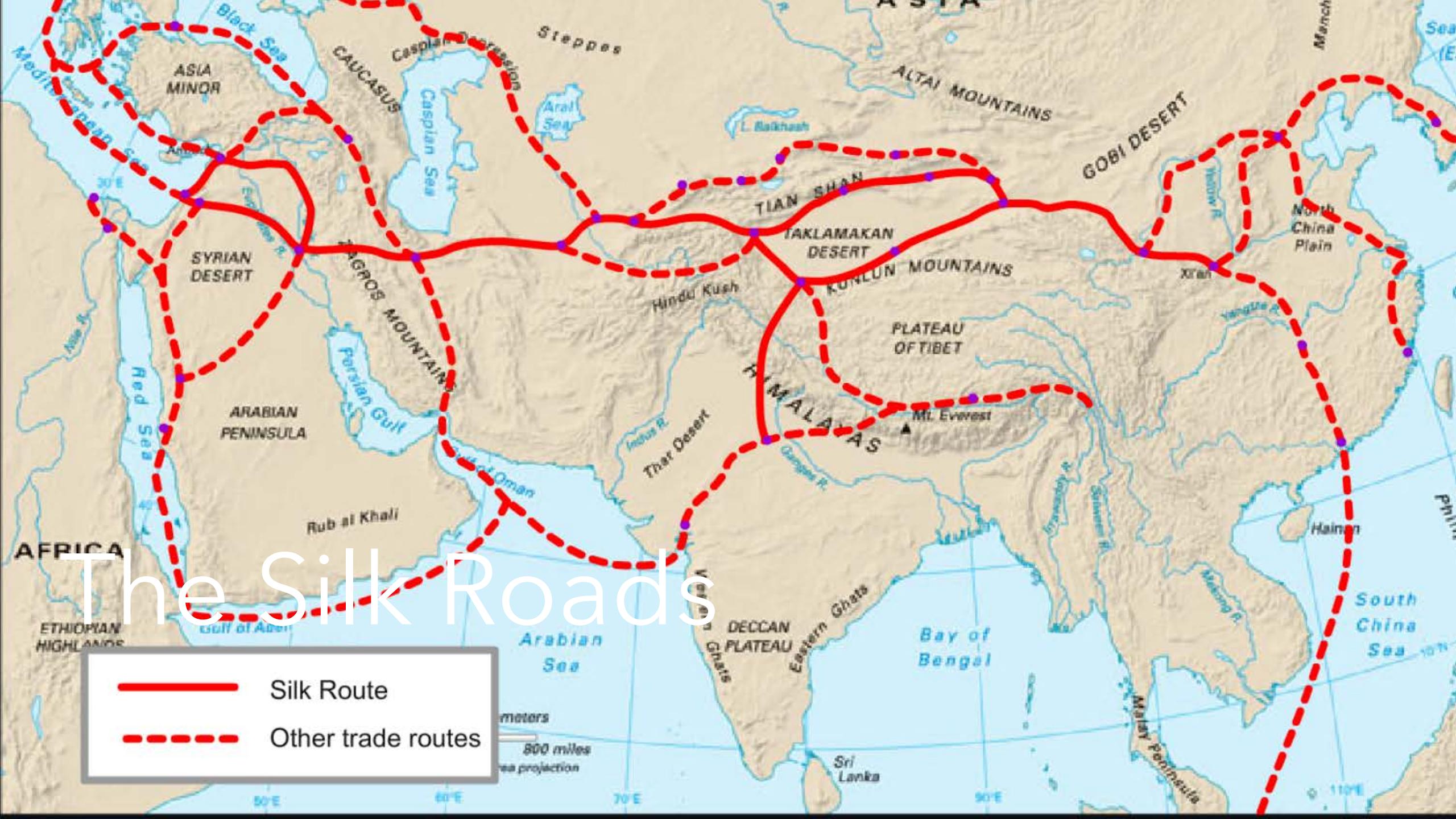
One of the BRI key projects: The
Khorgos Gateway in Kazakhstan

Picture Credit: Khorgos Gateway

“The Silk Road”

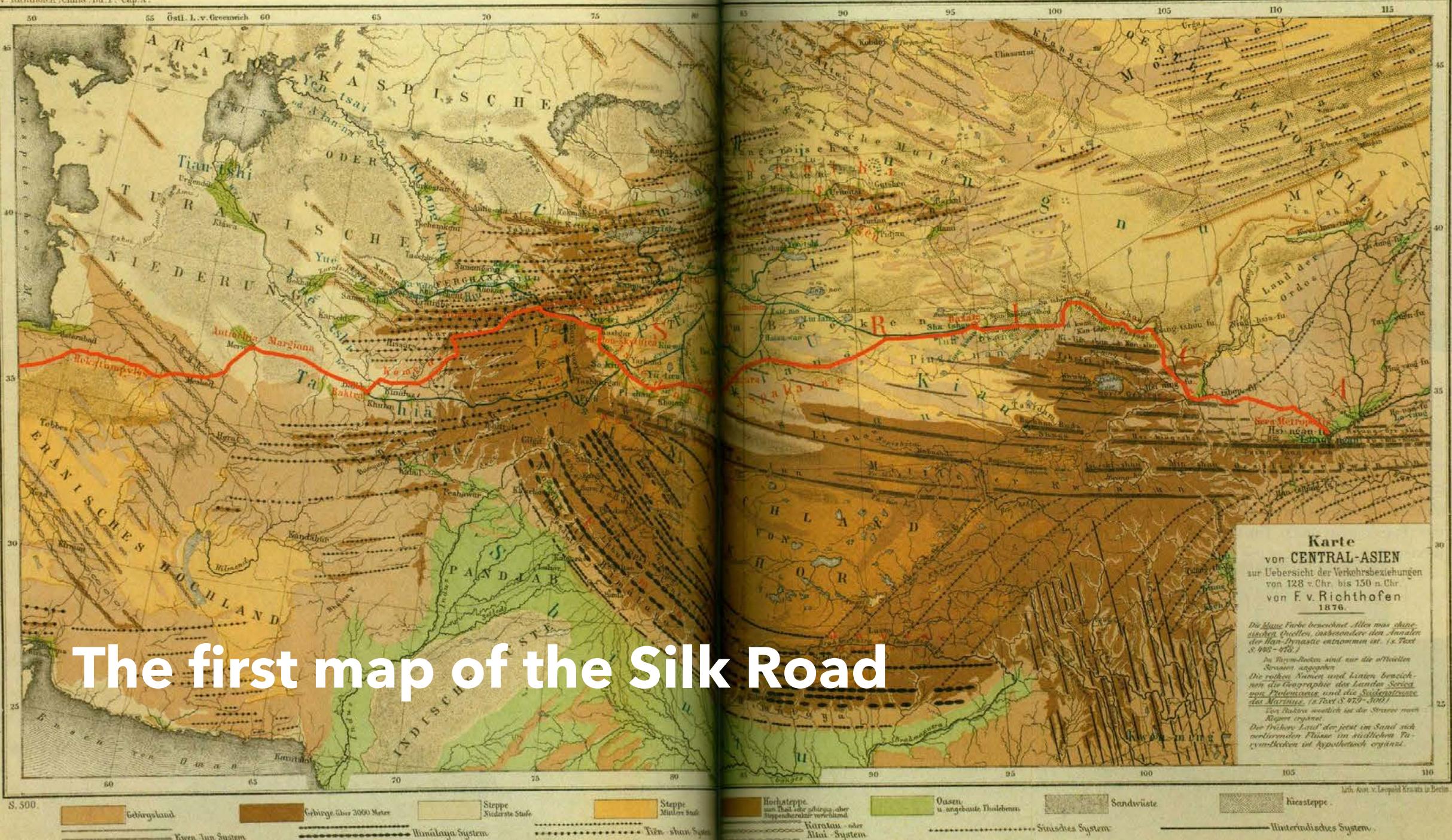
- Transcontinental trade route
- → networks of routes

- They connected what we generally call “East” and “West



“The Silk Road”

- Transcontinental trade route
- 5,000 miles
- 2000 BCE
- 6th or 4th century BCE to 7th century CE





Modern name

The “Silk Road”

Road to Samarkand, or
Dunhuang, etc.

Term coined by Ferdinand von
Richthofen (1833-1905) in 1877

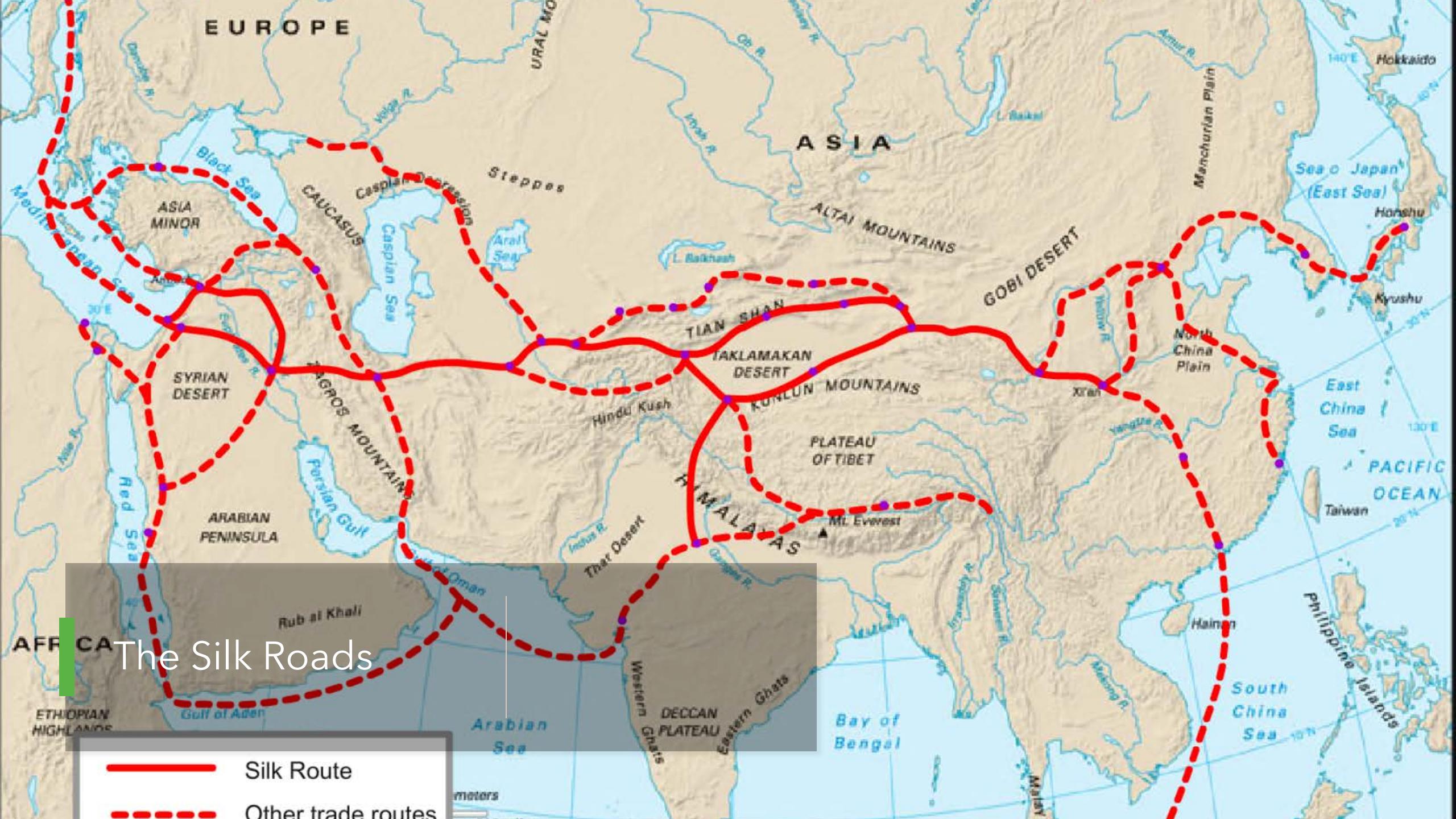
- Von Richthofen worked in China from 1868 to 1872 surveying coal deposits and ports
- Five-volume atlas
- Sources:
 - Ptolemy and Marinus
 - Chinese dynastic histories



Road?

- Stretch of shifting, unmarked paths
- Need to hire guides

The Silk Roads



Political map



Silk?

- Other goods:
- Chemicals
- Spices
- Metals
- Horses
- Saddles
- Leather products
- Ammonium chloride
- Paper

What else was transmitted?

- Ideas: philosophy, religions (missionaries, monks, people on the caravans)
- Technology
- Diseases

Relevance of the history of the Silk Road

- According to anthropologist Eric Wolf, the accepted and lazy history of civilization is one where:
- “Ancient Greece begat Rome, Rome begat Christian Europe, Christian Europe begat the Renaissance, the Renaissance begat the Enlightenment, the Enlightenment begat political democracy and the industrial revolution. Industry crossed with democracy in turn yielded the United States, embodying the rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.”
- Wolf, *Europe and the People without History*. (Berkeley 1982), p. 5
- → Alternative ways of looking at history

- By studying the Silk Roads we can position ourselves in other vantage points, we can learn to view history in a different light
- Another very important reason is the so called “New Silk Roads”
- This is a humongous project of the Chinese government that is currently being executed
- To give you a sense of what it entails I'll just give you some brief info

DAILY

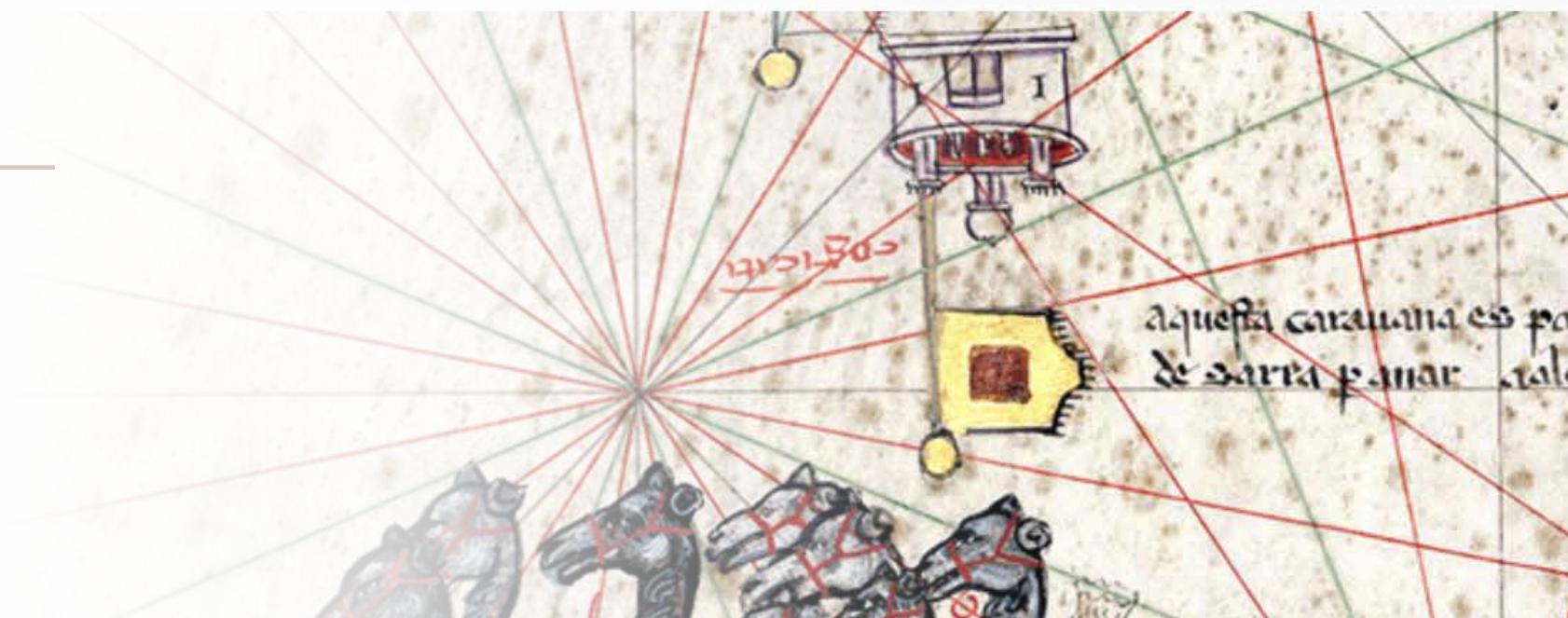
ICS & GOVERNMENT

The “New Silk Roads”

China’s New Silk Road

China’s ambitious Belt and Road Initiative involves significant funding and the world, aiming to improve trade and more.

<https://daily.jstor.org/chinas-new-silk-road/>



“Belt and Road Initiative” (BRI)

- Proposed investment:
- \$1 trillion, covering more than 50% of the world's population and a quarter of the global GDP
- “a creatively repurposed version” of the Silk Roads (Tim Summers of Chatam House - a British Think Tank)

“Belt and Road Initiative” (BRI)

- “Summers expects Chinese trade and investment in the Association of South East Asian Nations, including Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Philippines, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar, to exceed its trade with the E.U. some time in the 2020s.
- In the northwest province of Xinjiang, greater economic development is also expected to mitigate extremism among China’s restive Uighur Muslim minority.
- Linking land-locked interior cities like Chongqing by rail with Central Asia has begun to address regional imbalances within China.”

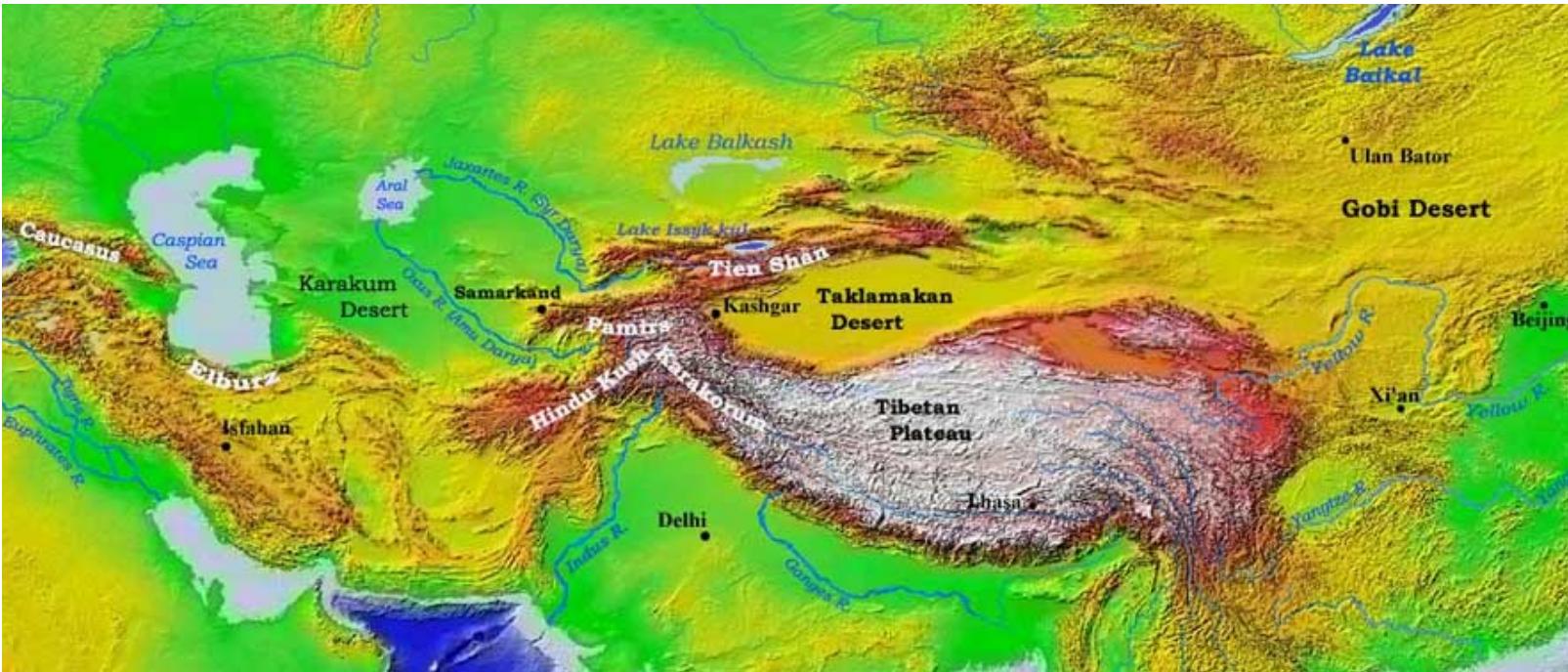
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cUxw9Re-Z-E&t=832s>
(00' - 6.20')
- Benefits? Problems?
- → Geopolitical shifts

- Relevance for the history of East-West cultural and commercial relations in general
- Another major factor is the unique quality of many archaeological finds from locations along the SR:
- e.g. materials discovered at Dunhuang and Turfan have enabled us to obtain a first-hand look at China and some of its neighbors during the medieval period

Some Geographical Features and Archaeological Preservation



Satellite view



Taklamakan Desert



Mogao Oasis - Dunhuang, China



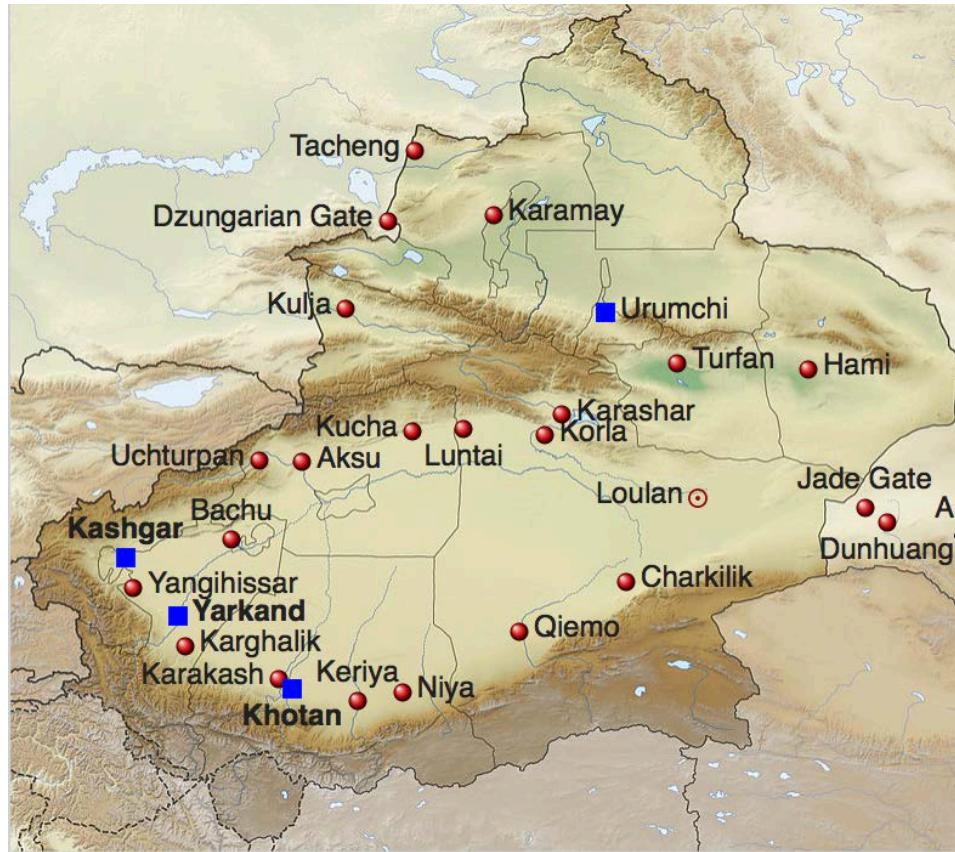
The beginnings of the Braldu river at its glacial source, Pakistan Karakorum



The South Enilchek glacier seen from the slopes of Mount Khan Tegri, Kyrgyzstan



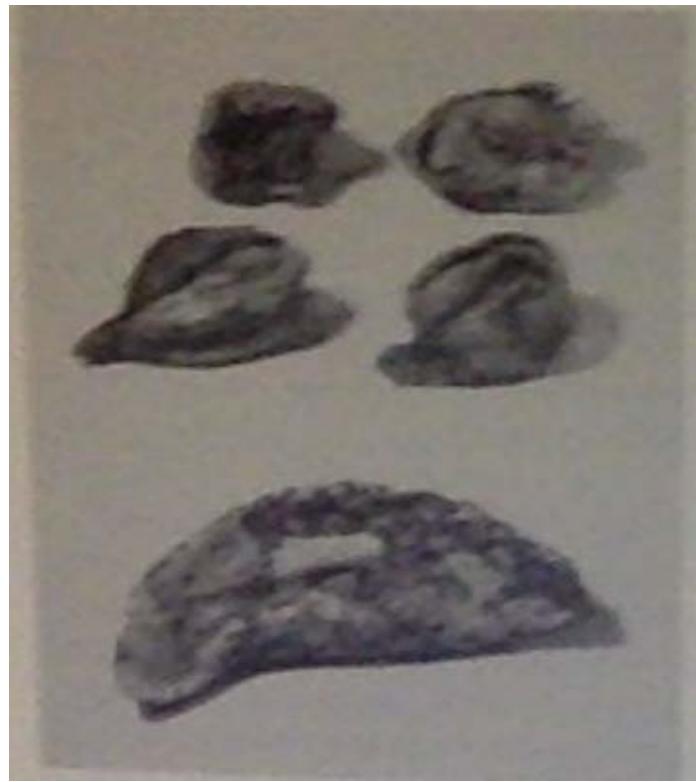
Tarim Basin Locations



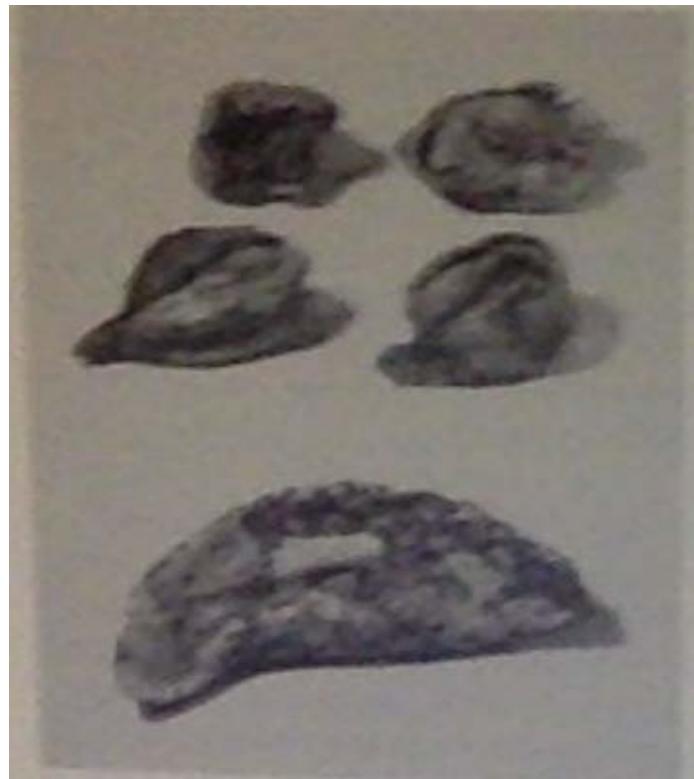


Dried silk flowers from the Astana graveyard, Turfan
7th-8th century CE





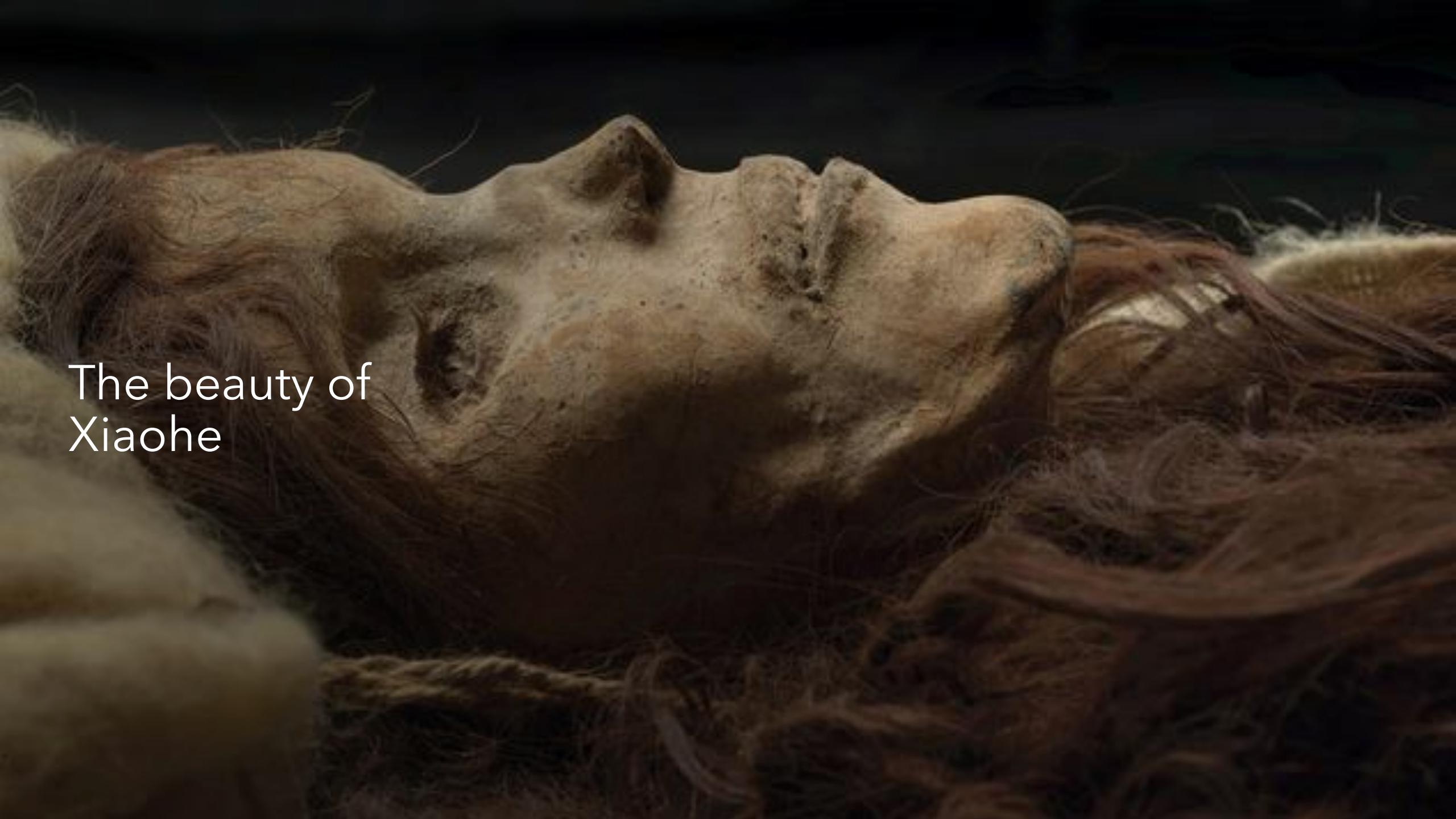
Dessicated dumplings from Turfan (7th or 8th century CE)



Subeshi woman with hat





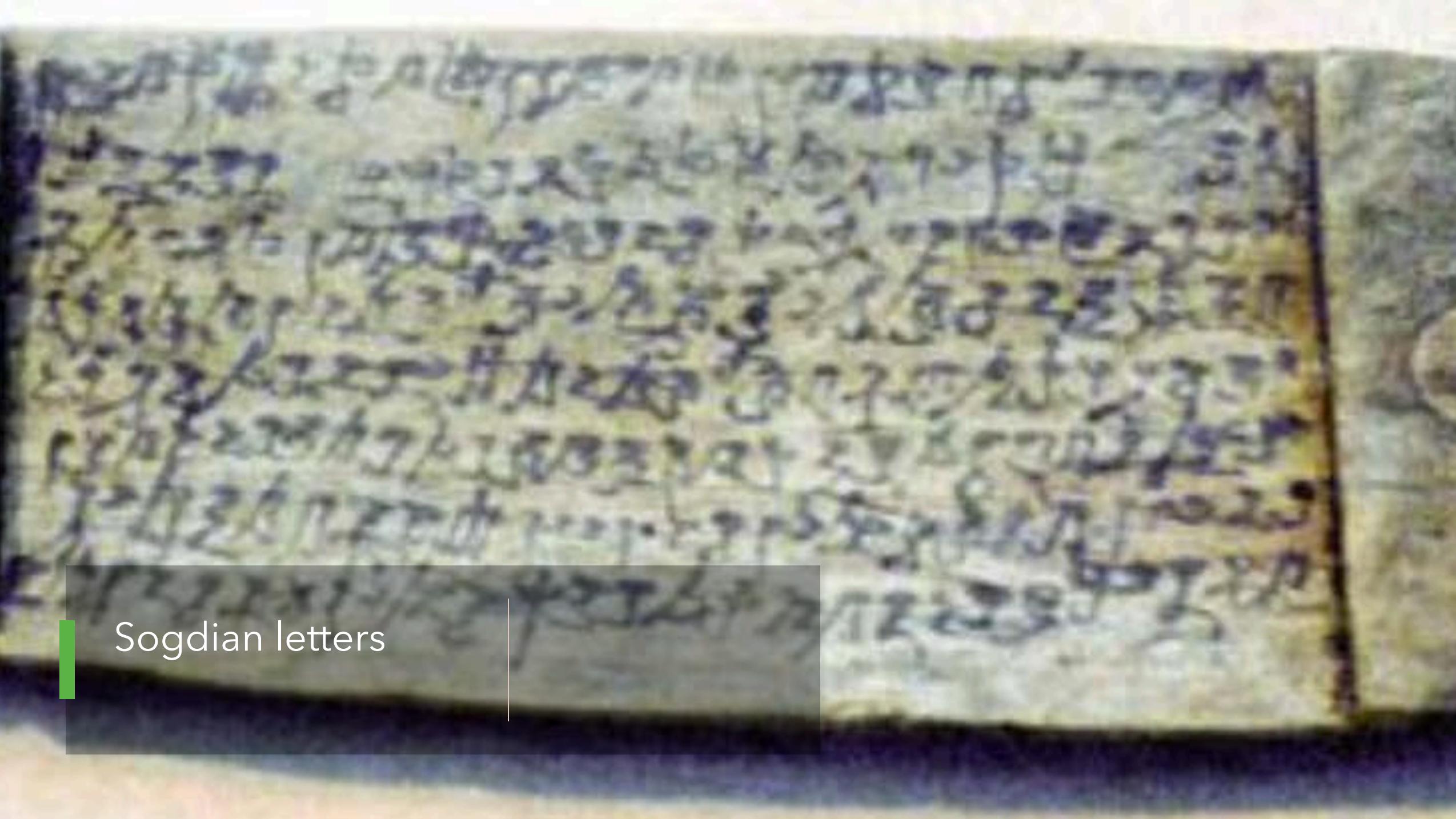


The beauty of
Xiaohe

Suggested Readings

- Articles by Victor Mair
- "Prehistoric Caucasoid Corpses of the Tarim Basin", *Journal of Indo-European Studies*, Fall/Winter 1995, Volume 23, Numbers 3 & 4, pp. 281-307
- Mair, Victor H., and Hickman, Jane, eds. Reconfiguring the Silk Road: New Research on East-West Exchange in Antiquity. Philadelphia, US: University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, 2014.

Sogdian letters





The “Discovery”

Scholars or scoundrels?

Bibliographic recommendation

- Hopkirk, Peter. *Foreign Devils on the Silk Road : the Search for the Lost Cities and Treasures of Chinese Central Asia* Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1984.

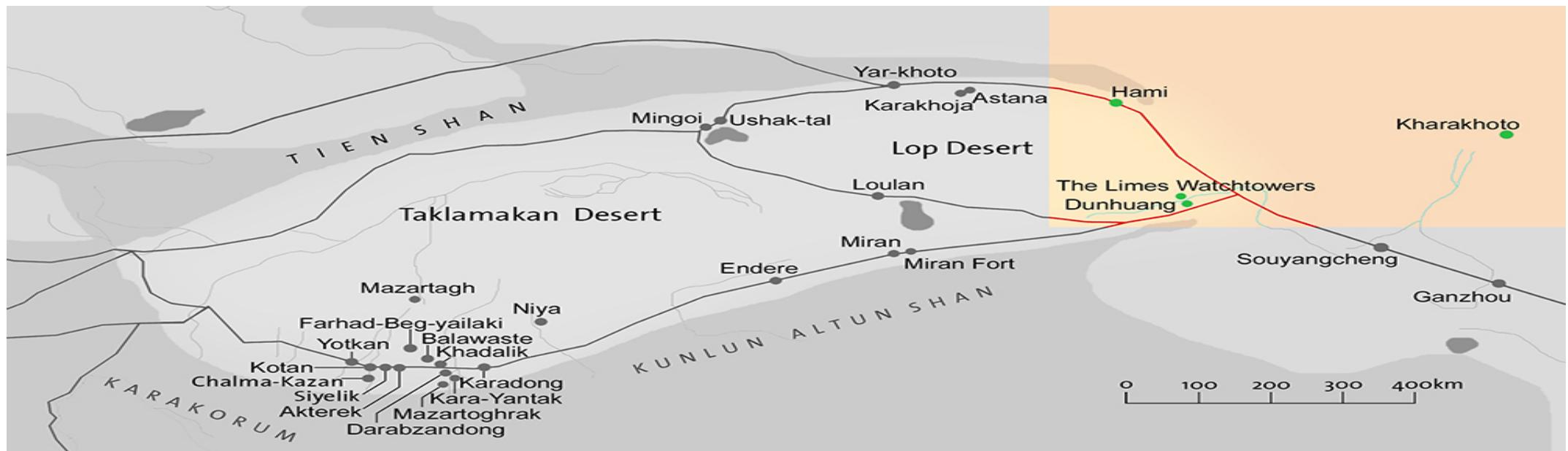
Moral issues

- "Scholars or scoundrels?"

Scholars or scoundrels?

- Aurel Stein (Britain) (B. Hungary 1862-1943)
 - Expeditions to Central Asia:
1900-1901, 1906-1908, 1913-1916 and 1930

Tarim Basin: sites explored by Aurel Stein



Scholars or scoundrels?

- Aurel Stein (Britain) (B. Hungary 1862-1943)

-Expeditions to Central Asia:

1900-1901, 1906-1908, 1913-1916 and 1930

- Sven Hedin (Sweden, 1865 - 1952)

-Expeditions to Central Asia:

1893-1897, 1899-1902, 1905-1908

- Albert von Le Coq (Germany)
- Paul Pelliot (France)
- Langdon Warner (US)
- Count Otani (Japan)

- Resorted to ruse
- Had real interest in the histories and cultures of the regions they visited
- Diligence and skill
- Connections with museums and universities
- Aided by governments (funding, diplomatic support)

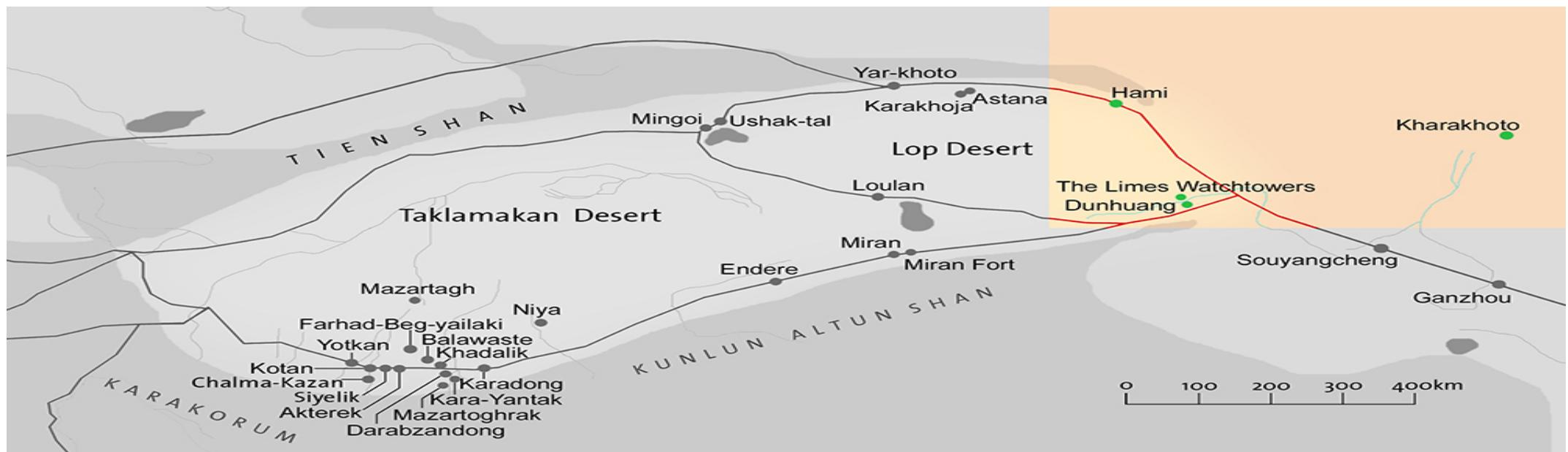
Geopolitical consequences

- Intensification of the “Great Game”
- popularly refers to the international rivalries for control of Central Asia
- especially in the second half of the nineteenth and early 20th centuries
- primarily between the British and Russian empires
- (Started in 1830)

1890 Map of Asia



Tarim Basin: sites explored by Aurel Stein





Mogao Oasis - Dunhuang, China





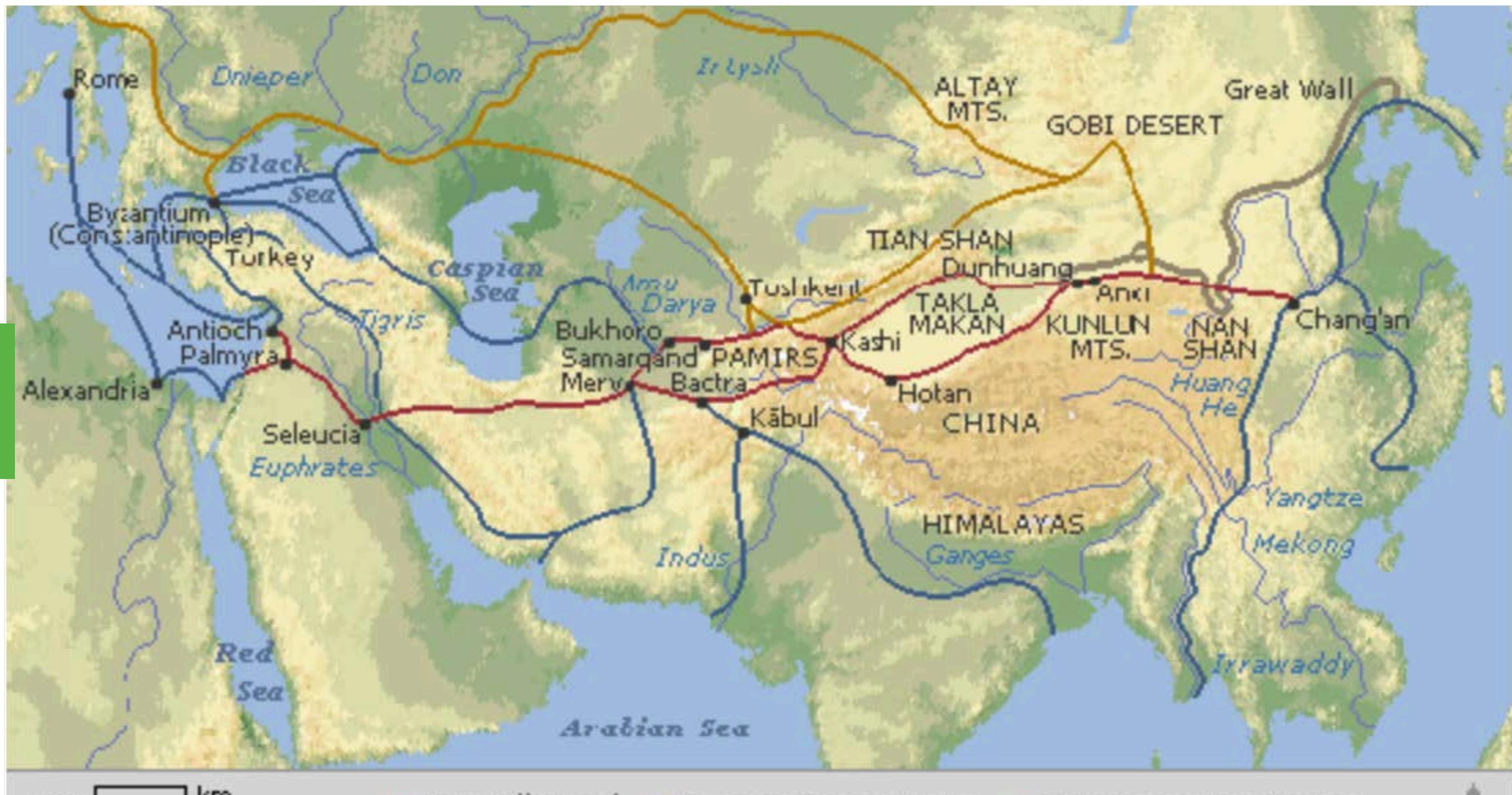




Overview

- 492 cells and cave sanctuaries in Mogao
- famous for statues and wall paintings
- spanning 1,000 years of Buddhist art:
- - (first constructed in 366 CE through 14th century)







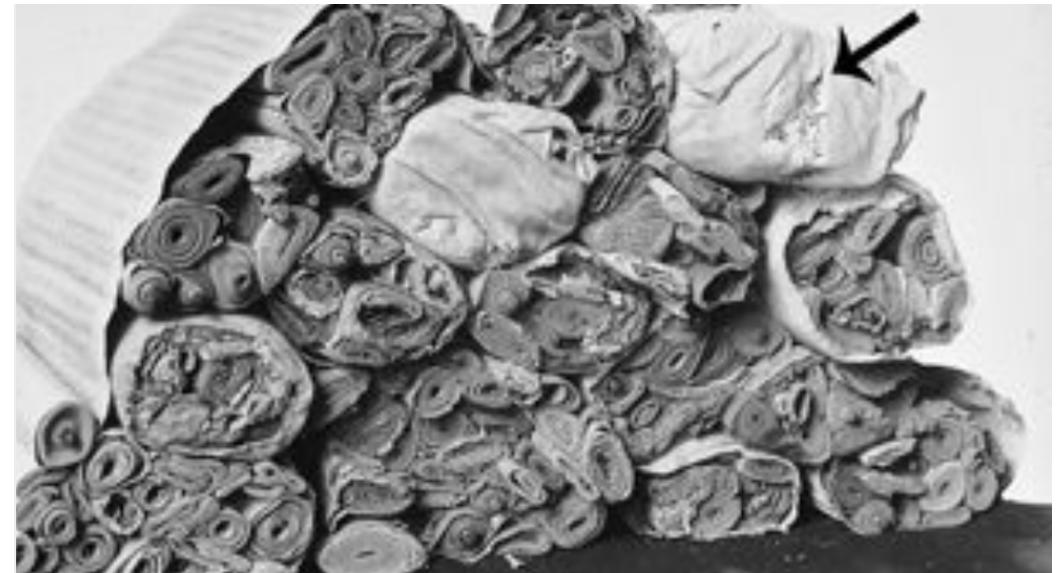
The Library Cave
(#17)



Digitized by srujanika@gmail.com



- More than 50,000 manuscripts,
4th to 11th century
- → reconfiguration of Buddhist
studies
- Buddhism, Manicheism,
Zoroastrianism, Daoism
- Also ritual objects, prints,
paintings
- → Dunhuanology





Daoist Priest
Wang



- "I was performing a pious act, in rescuing for Western scholarship those relics of ancient Buddhist literature and art which local ignorance would allow to lie here neglected or to be lost in the end."
- --The Ruins of Desert Cathay (1987)

Religion in Dunhuang

- Buddhist center:
- -- 15 monasteries
- Religious texts in Cave 17:
- Sanskrit, Sogdian, Tibetan, Uyghur, Khotanese, Hebrew
- → tolerance, cosmopolitanism
- → syncretism

- e.g.
- Manichean text:
- The World of Light is equated with Amitabha's Western Paradise

Cave 285



Cave 285

- sponsored by a number of wealthy donors, led by Prince Dong Yang,
- -- member of the Wei imperial house (dispatched to Dunhuang in 523)
- -- fifteen years as a local governor
- sumptuous decoration reflects its aristocratic patronage
- sculpture of the Buddha dominates main wall
- flanked by figures of meditating monks
- (example for the living monks who meditated there?)
- Flying spirits and Chinese deities cavort in heavens above
- <https://www.e-dunhuang.com/cave/10.0001/0001.0001.0285>

Paul Pelliot (1908)

