

# THE HISTORICAL FACTOR OF THE CITY OF DUNHUANG ON THE GREAT SILK ROAD IN THE DISCOURSE OF SINOLOGY

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## Abstract

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The revival of the Great Silk Road (GSR) has become relevant for many countries in recent years due to the widespread development of interregional and intercontinental economic ties. Interest in studying the history of the GSR has increased significantly over the past decades. This is due to the needs of the time and interregional and diplomatic relations of states and societies. The Great Silk Road is the path that formed a single world, united the states of the East and West, and thus directed the history of mankind in a new direction. As the practical significance of the GSR grows, scientists and specialists from all over the world, including Uzbekistan, are increasingly turning their attention to issues related to its history, present and future. In this regard, the scientific base of Uzbekistan A significant number of works devoted to the coverage of these issues have already been accumulated.

**Keywords:** Dunhuang, Great Silk Road, historical cities, ethnonym, baihua.

## INTRODUCTION:

Studying the history of the Silk Road, Uzbek scientists have researched and introduced into scientific circulation new information about the historical development of China's relations with other countries of the near and far abroad. First of all, it is worth noting the work of Doctor of Historical Sciences, Professor Ablat Khozhaev, who studies the history of the Silk Road, international relations in Central Asia and the ethnic situation in the region: in 2016, a monograph entitled "The Great Silk Road: Connections and Fates (Based on Chinese Sources and Documents)" was published in Tashkent. First of all, it should be noted that the monograph is based on Chinese historical sources and presents new and valuable material on the history, present and future of the Great Silk Road.

**Historical background of the toponym “Dunhuang”.** The toponym 敦煌 Dunhuang consisting of two hieroglyphs translated from Chinese means: 敦 dūn - to strengthen, to make friendly (relationships) and 煌 huáng - bright, brilliant, dazzling; magnificent, which together can be translated as "magnificent friendly relations". The word "Dunhuang" first appears in the "Historical Records - Biography of Dawan" (史记 大宛列传). The ancient Chinese, using hieroglyphic writing, explain the geographical name Dunhuang in different ways. For example, the historian of ancient China of the Eastern Han Dynasty (25–220 AD) Ban Gu (32–92 AD) gives the following translation in the Hanshu (historical chronicle of the Han Dynasty): “Dun – ‘large’, Huang – ‘rich’”. He considers Dunhuang to be a luxurious city. The historian of the Tang Dynasty (618–907 AD) Li Jifu (758–814 AD) writes in the book on counties and regions: “Dun is a large region, spreading widely in the west, so it is very famous”. In his opinion, these lands were of great importance, which is why they received the name Dunhuang. Many scholars believe that Dunhuang is a transcription of the geographical name of the area inhabited by a small ethnic group. However, scholars have not yet determined which small ethnic group gave the name to this place. There are opinions that these are transcriptions of the languages of the Xiongnu, the Tokharistan people, the Qiang language, etc. At the same time, some scientists believe that the word "Dunhuang" has no relation to the Chinese

language or even to the languages of small peoples, and may have come from Greek. Currently, most scientists agree that the word "Dunhuang" is a transcription from the language of a small people<sup>1</sup>.

## MATERIAL AND METHODS:

In the monograph by A. Khodjaev "The Great Silk Road: connections and destinies (based on Chinese sources and literature)" very interesting facts are given about the origin of the toponym Dunhuang. The author points out that the city of Dunhuang was one of the important points on the Great Silk Road. It was in Dunhuang that the Great Silk Road diverged in two lines. One road led towards Turfan, and the second road through Hotan<sup>2</sup>.

According to A. Khodjaev, the ethnonym Dunhuang has a Turkic name "Daksh-ata, Dasht-ota/Dashtata, in Greek sources Dashata<sup>3</sup>. For many centuries and until the middle of the 2nd century BC, Dunhuang was part of the possessions of the Kingdom of Ruziye (in modern pronunciation Yuezhi). Initially, this Chinese ethnonym was transformed from the Turkic name Guz-yer (Oguz-yer), which in translation means "land of the Guzes, i.e. Oguzes<sup>4</sup>.

It is worth noting the interesting fact that in the surviving scrolls and records of the "Library Cave" there are names with the prefixes Cao, Kang, An, Shi, Mi, etc. In ancient historical Chinese chronicles, these prefixes and names of people meant their places of birth. For example, Cao Xiaoxiao, Cao Tulichzhi are two names with the prefix Cao. This word in ancient chronicles meant the city of Fergana in present-day Uzbekistan. From this we can conclude that the prefixes to the names of people are their cities of the then khanates or states from which they came to China. For example, Kang - Samarkand, An - Bukhara, Shi - Shash (present-day Tashkent), Mi - Zarafshan<sup>5</sup>.

According to historical sources, we know that the Ruzi (Yuezhi) in the 1st century AD moved to the lands near the banks of the Amu Darya River after they suffered defeat in the struggle with the Western Han Empire. In ancient times, the toponym Dunhuang 敦煌<sup>6</sup> in Chinese was originally written with the keyword "fire" – 燉<sup>7</sup>, which meant "hot", "heated" and corresponds to the Turkic word "dasht" - steppe and desert. The surroundings of Dunhuang really consist of sandy deserts. Further, there are such variations of this toponym as 沙州 shāzhōu - sandy valley and 瓜州 guāzhōu valley of watermelons<sup>8</sup>.

Dunhuang city on the Silk Road has a three-thousand-year history. Toponym In ancient times, the Chinese called this city "the gate of the Western states"<sup>9</sup>, through which hundreds of caravans of traders passed for thousands of years with various goods, ranging from silk, tea, precious stones and even grain and horses<sup>10</sup>.

Dunhuang, being a key city on the eastern side of the Silk Road, was a must-see city for those entering and leaving China. In those distant times, many prominent figures of Buddhism passed through Dunhuang: Xuan Zang<sup>11</sup>, Kumarajiva (344-413), Paramartha (499-569) and Amogavajra (705-774)<sup>12</sup>.

The Great Silk Road connected China with the countries of Asia and Europe. The city of Dunhuang, located in Gansu Province, was a key city for the Chinese who were traveling to the West<sup>13</sup>. During the era of the Silk Road, Dunhuang was a transit city, and it was here that the caravan roads split into two routes: the Northern Road, which passed through the Uyghur and Kyrgyz lands, and the Southern Road, which passed through the lands of Tibet and Afghanistan. As mentioned above, ancient Dunhuang was one of the important cities of the Silk Road. Traders

<sup>1</sup> Ян Гуаньюй. Культура и история Дуьхуана как центра взаимодействия восточной и западной цивилизаций. // <https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/kultura-i-istoriya-dunhuana-kak-tsentra-vzaimodeystviya-vostochnoy-i-zapadnoy-tsivilizatsiy/viewer>

<sup>2</sup> Ходжаев А. «Великий Шелковый путь: связи и судьбы (на основе китайских источников и литературы)». Ташкент, 2018 г. Издательство "Навруз". Стр. 220

<sup>3</sup> Ходжаев А. «Великий Шелковый путь: связи и судьбы (на основе китайских источников и литературы)». Ташкент, 2018 г. Издательство "Навруз". Стр. 221

<sup>4</sup> Ходжаев А. Из истории древних тюрков (Сведения древнекитайских источников). Алматы, 2011 г. Стр.138-141

<sup>5</sup> Ходжаев А., Каримова Н., Кулдошев Ш., Джуманиёзов Ф., Азимов Х. «Ўзбекистон – Хитой муносабатлари тарихидан». –Тошкент: "Фан зиёси" нашриёти, 2022. – Б.15.

<sup>6</sup> <https://bkrs.info/slovo.php?ch=%E7%87%89%E7%85%8C>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.chacihai.com/cidian/112909.html>

<sup>8</sup> <https://bkrs.info/slovo.php?ch=%E7%93%9C%E5%B7%9E>

<sup>9</sup> Ходжаев А. «Великий Шелковый путь: связи и судьбы (на основе китайских источников и литературы)». Ташкент, 2018 г. Издательство "Навруз". Стр. 222

<sup>10</sup> Каримова Н. Из истории Буддизма. Ташкент, 2021 г. Стр.73

<sup>11</sup> Сюань-Цзан, Сюань-цзан) — китайский буддийский монах, учёный, философ, путешественник и переводчик времён династии Тан. Он известен в первую очередь своим семнадцатилетним путешествием в Индию, где он учился и общался со знаменитыми буддийскими мастерами, в частности в монастыре Наланда. Сюань цзан привёз в Танский Китай из Индии 657 текстов буддийского канона Трипитаки на санскрите. Впоследствии получил прозвище «Монах Трипитака».

<sup>12</sup> Каримова Н. Из истории Буддизма. Ташкент, 2021 г. Стр.78

<sup>13</sup> Каримова Н. Из истории Буддизма. Ташкент, 2021 г. Стр.76

traveling to China stopped here. Naturally, this city was also a crossing point of different cultures and peoples. A very large number of documents in other ancient languages were discovered in Dunhuang: Sogdian, Persian, ancient Syriac and Hebrew.

The Role of Dunhuang in the Spread of Buddhism in China. The famous scholar-sinologist, professor Natalia Karimova in her monograph "From the History of Buddhism" describes in detail the history of the spread of Buddhism in China. In this monograph, the author pays special attention to the city of Dunhuang in the history of the GSP. The author notes that "Dunhuang was rightfully considered the cradle of Buddhism in China." Buddhism appeared in China during the reign of Emperor Wu-di (141-87 BC)<sup>14</sup>.

According to N. Karimova, only after the fall of the Han Dynasty did Buddhism achieve a good influence in Asia. Dunhuang became known to the modern world in 1900, when the Mogao Caves were discovered, namely cave 17 called the "Library Cave". About 50,000 written monuments and sources of artistic culture were discovered in the "Library Cave", covering the period from the 4th to the 11th centuries. Buddhist archives were also found in the Mogao Caves, containing manuscripts in various languages.

The library cave contained about 15 cubic meters of manuscripts and paintings dating from 406-1002<sup>15</sup>. Among the manuscripts were religious texts, mainly Buddhist, but also Manichaean, Nestorian Christian, Taoist and Confucian works.

As is known, all the Mogao caves are painted with colored frescoes, the main theme of which is Buddhism. These colored frescoes are of great interest to this day to scientists and tourists from all over the world.

In the monograph by N. Karimova, a chronology of researchers from all over the world who explored the Mogao Dunhuang caves is given. Aurel Stein (1862-1943), a British explorer, was the first European to see these caves. After him, Paul Pelliot (1878-1945), a famous French sinologist, visited Dunhuang to study the scrolls, statues and frescoes. The reports of the exploration of the Dunhuang caves by Aurel Stein and Paul Pelliot aroused great interest throughout the scientific world. As N. Karimova writes, Aurel Stein managed to gain access to the cave from the monk Wang Yuanlu, who was the self-proclaimed keeper of the cave. Wang Yuanlu had long been begging local officials for funds to restore the caves, but all his attempts were unsuccessful. Subsequently, the monk agreed to sell Aurel Stein many thousands of religious and secular manuscripts, paintings and textiles, including the Diamond Sutra dating back to 868, and the oldest known printed text, documents in Sogdian, Tibetan, Sanskrit and Khotanese<sup>16</sup>. Next were Otani Kozui (1876-1948), a Japanese Buddhist scholar, and the Russian orientalist Sergei Oldenburg (1863-1934)<sup>17</sup>. These explorations of the Dunhuang caves laid the foundation for the scientific study of the history of Dunhuang.

The most frequent visitors to the city of Dunhuang during the Silk Road era were the Sogdians. This fact is also written about by the Chinese scholar Li Mingwei in his monograph "隋唐丝绸之路"<sup>18</sup>. The artifacts found during archaeological excavations over the past few years confirm these facts. In particular, the records found from the "Library Cave" under the number P 3559 say: "The city of Dunhuang in Sogdian documents is written as Druan. In Druan (Dunhuang) there are only 13 settlements, one of them is called Singhua. Among the inhabitants of this settlement there are many Huns."<sup>19</sup>.

**Buddhist sources in the development of the Chinese language baihua.** The ancient city of Dunhuang is considered the cradle of Buddhism in China. From Dunhuang, Buddhist monks walked along the Silk Road, spreading their knowledge among the local population. Buddhist preachers tried to adapt their sermons to oral speech in order to reach as many people as possible and attract the masses. Accordingly, Buddhist sutras dating back to the 3rd-5th centuries can be considered the best source for studying the oral speech of this period. In fact, in order to attract as many people as possible to this religion, preachers tried to bring their speech closer to oral speech.

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One such written source from the 3<sup>rd</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> centuries is the Chinese translation of the *Tàizǐ Xūdáná jīng* (The Sutra of the Prince of Sudan). This source has been translated into Chinese several times. C.S. Chen, who conducted research on Buddhism in China, expressed the following thoughts about this source: The Sutra of the Prince of Sudan is one of the most widely used sources. This sutra has been translated from Sanskrit into Chinese several times. The sutra translated into Chinese by Shen Jian in 385-431 is considered the most accurate and perfect

<sup>14</sup> Там же. Стр. 74

<sup>15</sup> Dischner M.Z. Marc Aurel Stein // <https://sogdians.si.edu/sidebars/marc-aurel-stein/>

<sup>16</sup> Каримова Н. Из истории Буддизма. Ташкент, 2021 г. Стр.81

<sup>17</sup> Каримова Н. Из истории Буддизма. Ташкент, 2021 г. Стр.78

<sup>18</sup> 李明伟. 《隋唐丝绸之路》。甘肃人民出版社。1994 年

<sup>19</sup> Хуны – это древние тюрки. Этим названием китайцы называли представителей всех народов расположенных с западной стороны Китая. Возможно согдийцев тоже называли хуннами.

translation. Little is known about the translator of the sutras, Shen Jian, except that he lived in Lanzhou, Gansu Province in what is now northwestern China. Besides this sutra, Shen Jiang translated nine more sutras”<sup>20</sup>.

By studying the grammatical structure of these written monuments, one can obtain information about the grammatical rules of the ancient Chinese language Baihua, its formation and development, as well as the changes that occurred in it.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS:

Ancient sources of Baihua contain examples of folk poetry dating back to the Tang Dynasty. I.T.Zograf suggests dividing the sources written in the Baihua language in the Middle Ages into the following two groups:

1) written monuments dating back to the period of transition from the ancient classical Chinese language to the Middle Ages - Dunhuang bianwen (Buddhist religious prescriptions for the common people) and Yulu, belonging to the Tang Dynasty; 2) medieval written monuments. Two aspects of the linguistic features of these written monuments should be highlighted: firstly, there are difficulties in reading the text of these monuments. Secondly, the style of the texts is specific to this period and differs sharply from the style of the language of the following period. However, a number of dictionaries and glossaries have been published on Chinese linguistics, which make our work much easier<sup>21</sup>.

One of the written sources written in baihua is the Dunhuang Bianwen. These written monuments were written during the Tang Dynasty (618-907) and are so named because they were found in the city of Dunhuang. The Dunhuang Bianwen of the Tang Dynasty contain elements of wenyan, but there are few words in the yulu genre that are borrowed from wenyan.

Bianwen are texts that are completely recited by monks in strict accordance with the Buddha's instructions. The text begins with the sentence "Thus says the sutra" and quotes a passage from the sutra. This passage is then explained in prose, after which it is repeated in poetic form. In this respect, bianwen are close to oral works in the way the original is presented. Analyzing the texts of Dunhuang Bianwen which were collected by Chinese linguists: 王重民 Wang Chungming, 王庆菽 Wang Qingshu, 向达 Xiang Da, 周一良 Zhou I-liang, 启功 Qi Gong, 曾毅公 Dzeng I-gung in 1957 “敦煌变文集” Collection of Dunhuang Bianwen, which consists of eight volumes containing 187 bianwen. “敦煌变文集” Collection was republished in Beijing in 2003 by the international publishing house “商务印书馆国际有限公司出版” these written sources of this period can be considered valuable material in the process of forming the Chinese language Baihua.

The lexical and grammatical features of the Chinese baihua language can be studied based on the texts of the Dunhuang bianwen, huaben and pinghua, jugondiao, jiajü and novels. These sources serve as important material in studying the historical development, features and differences of the baihua language from the classical wenyan language. 变文 biànwén is an oral description of any story or historical event. In this genre, the poetic part of the story is performed and the prose part is narrated. Sources written in the bianwen genre include Buddhist stories, historical events and folklore samples. Among the early baihua sources, the most studied are the sources of the pinghua, bianwen and yulu genres. 宋元话本 Sòng yuán huà běn - huabeni of the Song Yuan era. In this genre, stories were told orally, shadow plays and puppet theater were also included in the huaben genre; 平话 Píng huà pinghua - a popular genre of narrative prose of the Song Dynasty, an expressive retelling of a literary work or historical event; 金元诸宫调 Jīn yuán zhū gōngdiào - in the Jin and Yuan dynasties and the art of singing a historical event accompanied by the pipa musical instrument; 元杂剧 Yuán zájù - Yuan Dynasty Zaju arose during the Song Dynasty and is one of the most common genres during the Yuan Dynasty. It performed the works of writers of that period, this genre is also known as Yuan drama; 语录 Yǔlù - yulu - recordings of speeches. The exposition of the canons of Buddhism - yulu is mainly associated with the spread and propaganda of Buddhism in China. During the Northern Song Dynasty, yulu were considered a means of communication in diplomatic negotiations<sup>22</sup>.

I.S. Gurevich in his article devoted to the study of the genre of yulu, notes that Buddhism penetrated into China in the 1st century BC. Missionary monks made a great contribution to the spread of Buddhism in China, they, together with merchants and artisans, translated Buddhist sutras written in Sanskrit and translated them into Chinese, orally, and thus propagated this religion. It is not entirely correct to characterize the first translations of Buddhist sutras into Chinese as examples of oral speech - baihua. But among the written monuments of this period, we can safely say that these translations were the closest to the oral speech of that time<sup>23</sup>.

<sup>20</sup> Khasanova F.M. “Lexical-Semantic and Grammatical Features of the Chinese Baihua Language.” “Akademnashr” Publishing House, Tashkent, 2024.p 24

<sup>21</sup> Зограф И.Т. Среднекитайский язык. Опыт структурно-типологического описания. С.-Петербург. «Наука», 2005 г. Стр. 259

<sup>22</sup> Khasanova F.M. “Lexical-Semantic and Grammatical Features of the Chinese Baihua Language.” “Akademnashr” Publishing House, Tashkent, 2024.

<sup>23</sup> Гуревич И.С. Роль письменных буддийских источников для исследований в области исторической грамматики китайского языка / Розенберговский сборник. Востоковедные исследования и материалы. – СПб., 2014. – С. 157.



Thus, it should be noted that the ancient city of Dunhuang, being a crossroads on the Silk Road, played an important role not only in the spread of Buddhism in China, but also became an important factor in the formation of the Chinese language Baihua. In fact, Buddhist sutras were very difficult to translate into Chinese Wenyan. Wenyan is not only an ancient language, but also a classical Chinese literary language. Chinese classical literature is written in Wenyan. Although Wenyan is an ancient language, the changes that occurred in the life of society were not reflected in its vocabulary. On the other hand, the Baihua language changed and improved in accordance with the times. This language can be assessed as a language of oral communication, reflecting the changes in the social life of that period. The Baihua language was used in society in parallel with the Wenyan language. The ancient languages Wenyan and Baihua differed significantly not only in application, but also in lexical and grammatical features. Before the Middle Ages, the Baihua language existed only in oral speech, and elements of the classical language - the Wenyan language, were used very rarely in the sources of this period. It turns out that despite the fact that the Baihua and Wenyan languages were used simultaneously in society, they differed significantly from each other. The lexical and grammatical features of the Chinese Baihua language can be studied on the basis of texts of the bianwen, huaben and pinghua genres, jugondiao, jiajui and novels. These sources serve as important material in studying the historical development, features and differences of the Baihua language from the classical Wenyan language<sup>24</sup>.

**Modern Dunhuang is a pearl in the desert.** The well-preserved Buddhist cultural monuments are located outside the city of Dunhuang, which has made the city a center of tourism in the last 20 years. In 1998, Dunhuang was awarded the title of "Model Tourism City"<sup>25</sup>.

As one of the ancient centers of the Silk Road, the ancient city of Dunhuang has become a meeting point for a variety of people and cultures. Today, it is a popular tourist destination that combines rich history and beautiful nature, attracting more than 9 million visitors a year. This is equivalent to a tenfold increase in Dunhuang's population of 200,000, an impressive figure compared to other major tourist cities in China. The service industry, especially tourism, accounts for nearly 60% of Dunhuang's economy. Unlike other smart cities that focus on urban management and services, Dunhuang's smart city model is based on smart tourism. Sun Xiaoqiang, chairman of Dunhuang Smart Travel Technology Company (DSTC), said: "To build a smart city, we must focus on our core business. We built a smart city using smart tourism as a lever." Founded in 2014, DSTC is responsible for the implementation and management of the pioneering Dunhuang Smart City project<sup>26</sup>.

## CONCLUSION:

Dunhuang is an urban oasis on the edge of the Taklamakan Desert. It is relatively small compared to other cities in China. Today, Dunhuang is a major cultural and tourist center. It attracts a lot of attention from tourists and pilgrims from all over the world. Here you can not only visit Buddhist shrines, but also take part in the local traditional dragon boat festival, which is held every May. The history of this ancient city is associated with the Mogao Grottoes, also known as the "Caves of a Thousand Buddhas", an extraordinary collection of 492 caves dug into the cliffs south of the city. The first Buddhist cave was built by monks in 366 AD, which distinguished the city from other cities as a center of Buddhist learning and attracted many pilgrims. Monks and pilgrims often traveled along the Silk Road, which led to the spread of various religions, including Buddhism, in this region. Today, Dunhuang is an object of study in various fields of science: history, religious studies, cultural studies, linguistics, etc.

The city was a meeting place for various cultures, including Chinese, Indian, Persian and Arabic. This led to the exchange of not only goods, but also knowledge, religions and art. There were Buddhist temples and monasteries in Dunhuang, which testifies to the spread of Buddhism from India to China.

Important archaeological finds have been discovered in the vicinity of Dunhuang, including the famous Mogao Caves, which contain rich collections of Buddhist art and manuscripts. These finds help to understand the cultural and religious interactions of that time.

In sinology, the study of Chinese history and culture, Dunhuang is considered a key element in understanding the dynamics of cultural and economic exchange along the Silk Road. Research focuses on the following aspects:

Dunhuang became a place where various cultural traditions were synthesized. This contributed to the formation of unique features of Chinese culture, including art, language, literature and philosophy. Buddhism, which came to China through Dunhuang, had a significant impact on spiritual life and art. Sinologists study how Buddhist translations were adapted to the Chinese context.

<sup>24</sup> Хасанова Ф.М. Лексико-семантические и грамматические особенности китайского языка байхуа. Автореферат диссертации на соискание ученого звания доктора философии по филологическим наукам (PhD) – 10.00.05 Языки и литература народов Азии и Африки. Ташкент, 2021 г.

<sup>25</sup> Ходжаев А. «Великий Шелковый путь: связи и судьбы (на основе китайских источников и литературы)». Ташкент, 2018 г. Издательство "Наврўз". Стр. 224

<sup>26</sup> <https://www.huawei.com/uz/news/uz/2018/dunhuang-smart-toursim>

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