

HUNS AND CHINESE FRONTIER POLICIES ON THE SILK ROAD

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In the past few years lots of publication have printed about the Silk Road, which emphasised the role of Chinese Han dynasty in opening of the international trade route. But most of them investigated the question from the Chinese point of view, they did not focus the real frontier situation. In my brief outline I try to summarise the frontier history between the Chinese and steppe people based on contemporary Chinese historical records. I found that controlling the trade route fierce war took place between the Huns and Chinese and the local state cities join them according to their interest of economy.

Keywords: Silk Road, trade, Han-dynasty, Huns, Xiongnu, Tarim basin, He Xi Corridor

The frontier relations between the Huns or Xiongnu and the Han-Chinese have been studied for centuries mainly from a Chinese perspective so far, and it seemed that Chinese had right to occupy the Silk Road and Huns were just robbers and barbarians, who invaded China for getting goods from there. The later theory still can be found in some papers and monographs, but the viewpoint is getting change in recent publications. New results of archaeology and history show that commercial and economic interests had determined frontier relations between the two nations.

In my present brief summaries, based on contemporary Chinese historical records (Watson, 1961) (Hill, 2003)¹, I try to give an outline of frontier relations of present-day Northern China, where the big international trade route, The Silk Road has been established. Reading the Chapter 88 of the Hou Han shu, I have found some important, less cited data about the frontier history of Hun-Chinese relations, which give new light on the development of Silk Road and the movement of people there. Today several new publications have printed about that the Silk Road is not opened only the 2nd century BC, but it operated much earlier, maybe from the Bronze Age, the previous date was only the expansion of Chinese (Surugue, 2017). Emperor Wu Di (141-87 BC) succeeded in conquering

¹ I refer to especially the Shi Ji and the Hou Han shu chronicles.

territories from the Huns in order to sell their goods directly on the international market. The commentary of Hou-Han shu said that:

«The natural conditions and customs of the Western Regions were not known in ancient times. In the Han era, Zhang Qian conveyed (our) goodwill to remote regions – through his astuteness. Ban Chao deployed all his energy and earned a Marquisate – through his ambition. In the end, they were able to accomplish glorious deeds in the far West, restraining and subduing foreign kingdoms. The reputation of our soldiers made them submit. Rich gifts were sent to win them over to us. None of them neglected to present the marvellous products of their countries in homage, and with sincere affection. With bared heads, they walked towards the east on their [knees and] elbows before the Imperial Court and the Son of Heaven. Therefore mao and ji officials were established to share responsibility for these affairs. The Protector General and an army corps were put in control to exercise authority. Those who yielded early were rewarded with baskets of gold, and button seals in the form of tortoises and seal ribbons were granted to pacify them. Those who submitted late had their heads hung at the Northern Gate [of the Capital, Luoyang], which was rubbed with their blood» (Batjargal, 2016, 88. Section 28).

Historical sources report that non-Chinese peoples, mostly Sakas and Tocharians, populate beyond the Yellow river and the ancient cities of the Tarim basin¹. According to Shi Ji² 36 city states had that territory, they did not intergrated into one strong political unit. For a long time, they mediated commercial goods: they sold Chinese luxury product³ to the west and supplied Chinese with raw materials. Thus, the steppe horsemen acquired all trade-related benefits. Textual evidence suggests the contact ad trade between China and the Tarim basin had started already before the rise of Han dynasty since the ancient economist Guan Zhong (645 BC) records the Yuezi to be suppliers of the jade from the west and under the Han dynasty trade seems to have prospered, especially during the Eastern Han.

The wealth of the cities attracted Huns, they also wanted to control the international trade route. The first significant occupation of these states related to Maodun shanyu, who had been sent hostage to Yuezhi, who lived Gansu corridor. During his stay, he was able to gather information about that the territory and observed their way of live and the source of wealth. When he proclaim himself as a shanyu, strenghen his central power, he attacked the Yuezhi in 176 BC. He killed the king of Yuezhi and got the

¹ Tocharians lived the northern fringes of the Tarim basin and in the Lop nor region. Saka people mostly settled down in the Tarim basin.

² Sima Qian: Shi Ji, Chapter 110.

³ The main Chinese luxurious goods: lacquer ware, paper, silk, and decorated bronze mirrors.

control over the commercial roads leading west of Ordos, so revenue from tax and other services increased the budget of the Hunnic state. Their dependant people, Saka, Qiang and Tokhars, continued to trade with the Han dynsty, but under the Hunnic somain. The kingdom of the Central Plains, or the Han also wanted to receive benefits from the big trade route, as the Hou Han shu wrote about it: «The reason of the war between the Han and Huns to own the territory of Jushi (Turfan) and Yiwu (Hami) and western areas. How to get to from Shanshan via Congling to get to the western kingdoms» (Batjargal, 2016, Section 1).

That's why the Chinese prepare for the war for the Silk Road in order to avoid paying taxes for Huns, which burdened their state budget, the other reason was the pain to trade directly with their own products, and get imported goods from their own traders such as the famous «tian ma» or quick horses, jade. The Chinese spies, envoys and merchants collected information of the products of the western region¹, e.g. major metal mines, which was available in the western area, they account contained reports iron and copper deposits in the Tarim Basin between Turfan and Dunhuang. The Western Region had already developed mining and metal casting techniques prior to the Han dynasty. The native of Shanshan were skilled at making arms (MA, 1999, p. 224). The raw materials of bronze making, the tin came from Kucha, and the gold was from the oasis of Khotan. and the Altay Mountain as well. Flax was extensively cultivated in the Western Regions and the cotton perhaps first eneted from the Indiain subcontinent. It is not clear whether this material was imported or a local product (MA, 1999, p. 223). In addition, many fruits, such as grapes, came from the west to the east via the Silk Road. People from the steppes have also sold furs and animal products. The frontier trade, the cereals did not have a significant role, which had long been claimed by researchers in the past centuries.

After unifying the territory of Central Plains or Chinese principalities, Qin Shi Huangdi (221-210 BC) was the first ruler who invaded the Northern steppe regions and fought with Huns². He achieved a short lived victory over them around 215 BC. After Maodun became the shanyu, Chinese power got back to the Central Plains, and the new

¹ Based on Zhang Qian's report, the Han interest in the Western Regions increased and more envoys were dispatched in the following years. Sima Qian, Shi Ji. 123. Watson, 1961.

² In 215BC, Meng Tian led an army to attack Huns. At that time, the main force of Huns was spread in the west of Yinshan Mountain, the north of Helan Mountain, Longxi County and Hetao Area. During the summer and autumn he and his army won the lost territory to the south of Yellow River. In the spring in 214BC, the main force of Qin army marched across the Yellow River from Wuyuan County, entered Langshan Mountain and the other force captured Helanshan Mountain. Under the fierce offensive of Qin's army, the Huns had to escape to 700 li (217 miles) far away to the north of the desert. Thus far, the lost territory in the border area of the former Qin and Zhao states was all recovered.

dynasty, the Han, often suffered defeats and they had to pay taxes. The Chinese policy changed, when Emperor Wu Di (140-87 BC) became the ruler. He was the first after a long period, who focused on his reign to win over Huns, in order to achieve his idea, gave lots of bribery to the princes of Huns in the frontier zones and trained their own army the methods of the Huns. When the Huns have been weakened by throne feud, Wu Di's general, Huo Qubing¹ attacked Huns in present day Gansu province. The first goal was to cut connection between the Huns and Qiang² allies and get a corridor along the Yellow River to open markets in some cities. The preparation of the war has begun in 123 BC and Han acquired a territory stretching from the Hexi Corridor to Lop Nur, thus achieved to cut the Hun off from their Qiang allies. Again, Han forces repelled a joint Xiongnu-Qiang invasion of this northwestern territory in 111 BC. Chinese control Gansu opening the way to the Tarim basin, Between 119 and 104 BC the easternmost polities came under increasing Han domination though both Loulan (Lop nor region) and Gushi (Jushi) were hostile to the Han, harassing envoys and aiding the Huns which resulted in a Chinese attack roughly 109-108 BC. The Yumen Gate was the westernmost Chinese holding (Watson, 1961).

The occupied territory was only small part of the areas west of the Yellow River, today's Gansu province, but it was a strategic section of the Silk Road. It was called «He Xi Corridor» which was a narrow canyon on the bank of the Yellow River and it was strategically important along the Silk Road trade. The Yellow River flows between Lanzhou and Wuwei in a narrow stream, where caravans passed through. Other important factor was the water supply of travellers, it was supplied by water sources of the Qiliang Mountains³. On the edge of the Gobi, caravans could get fresh water from the mountains. The mountain range is 800 kilometres long and its highest peak reaches 4000 meters. However, the Chinese did not have the full control over the vast north-western area, they were able control

¹ Huo Qubing (140-117 BC) was a famous general of the Han. In 121 he was promoted to cavalry general and successfully fight against the Xiongnu in six campaigns. During the first campaign he captured the Xiongnu khan Xiutu and seized some religious bronze statues erected at Mt. Yanzhi (Shandong, Gansu). In the same year his army marched the long way across Lake Juyan and the Qilian Range where he again defeated a Xiongnu army. Angry about the successive defeat of his military leader Prince Xiutu, Prince Hunya killed the former and defected with his whole army to the Han empire. The territory in the west that had been occupied and it became part of the Han empire and was administered in commanderies. In 119 Emperor Wu ordered another campaign that was to be led by Wei Qing and Huo Qubing. The latter commanded the division based in the region of Dai and Youbeiping and attacked the Xiongnu khans Tuntou Han. He captured them, together with a great number of high military leaders. Huo Qubing's army ascended Mt. Langjuxu, where the general brought a sacrifice to Heaven as representant of Emperor Wu.

² Qiang is the name of a historical group of people, who lived in the western region of present China, particularly the Gansu corridor.

³ It is very important mountains, which has a Chinese name Nanshan, or the southern mountain as well. The meaning of the Qiliang Mountain is Tengri.

some oasis cities, where Chinese farmers and soldiers were settled down. New outposts were established by the Han, four of them were in the Hexi Corridor, namely Jiuquan, Zhangye, Dunhuang and Guzang (Wuwei), which supervised the peoples of the region. It was the basement for supplying Chinese colonies and the spreading westward. From there the Chinese Han dynasty successfully went ahead westward, but according to the sources and some publication, the Han was not enough strong to settled down the cities of the Tarim-basin (Batjargal, 2016)¹.

Han was eventually victorious and established the Protectorate of the Western Regions and the Hunnic confederation weaken, but the did not give up fighting with the Chinese army, with consisted of steppe tribes as Qiang or Saka. (MA, 1999, p. 232) Between 84 and 59 BC Hun policy toward China changed from one of covert aggression to the resumption of open hostilities; China sought to avoid war, they had two major attacks only in 71 and 68 BC (Psarras, 2004, p. 37). Unfortunately, we get information only from the Chinese side, and propably they exgarrate, but it was real that they were able to stop the major Hun attack against the Silk road for decades. But around 60 BC, some leaders of the city states also rebelled the Han administration and some of them subjected to the Huns, but the political unstability the Huns were not able to take advantage that situation, because at least five persons wanted to be the supreme kings or shanyu. A fierce battle began for the throne. One of them, Huhanye, was not able to keep power, that's why he at last submitted to China in 53 BC, the other leader or Zhizhi became independant and he kept controlling the the territory of Gobi desert and beyond². State of the Huns officially has not divided for a century, but in fact two leaders governed the northern and the southern parts.

Controlling the trade routes from the end of the 1st century BC the Chinese received tremendous revenues (customs, taxes, security services, relay stations, product exports, etc), raw materials and new technologies also arrived from the West. Due to that China developed a lot. The disadvantage of that period that trade routes have been constantly changing: a flood or just drought has redrawed routes of the caravans. Because of the attacks of the Huns, who did not give up getting back their territories from the Han (mainly in the northern area, around Turpan) were dangerous. The Chinese had to keep an eye on the border area because the Huns regularly organised great hunting³ pretending the border

¹ According to the Hou Han hu. 88, the Han subjected those kingdoms and required to send taxes and hostages, but they dd not ruled the territory until Ban Chao's governorship. He established a Protector General status there, but it did not last long.

² They are called as Northern Huns and they occupied a vast territory from Manchuria to Easter Turkestan.

³ The steppe horsemen had a traditional hunting event at least one time in a year. They practised the tactics, which used in the battlefield. The Shi Ji and Hou Hans hu often mentioned these events regarding the Huns.

attack with the aim of regaining their former territories. The Han soldiers and farmer had to build observation towers and keep the land under observation. This multiple protection could not silence the border from the end of the 1 st century BC. As central imperial power weakened and could not financially support the cities, military sites, and the frontier kingdoms of Western countries, they subjected to the Huns or tried to become independent (Batjargal, 2016, Section 20-26). From the 1 CE the small kings of the Tarim Basin joined those powers, who promise them more, this price policy determined the lives of the inhabitants of the Western Regions. Another factor contributed the changes: internal policy of the Huns. If the supreme king of the Huns could build strong central power, they were able to attack Chinese cities and successfully won over Han army. The Chinese chroniclers themselves acknowledge that sometimes the Western Regions have been completely lost. The Chinese dominance on the Silk Road put to end 9CE, when usurper Wang Mang (9-23 CE) acquired the Han throne. He neglected the western areas, so local powers began to rebel and created independent states. The Hou Han shu says the following: «During the time of Emperor Ai [6 BC-1 CE] and Emperor Ping [1-5 CE], the principalities of the Western Regions split up and formed fifty-five kingdoms. Wang Mang, after he usurped the Throne [in 9 CE], demoted their kings to marquesses. Following this, the Western Regions became resentful, and rebelled. They, therefore, broke off all relations with the Middle Kingdom and, all together, submitted to the Xiongnu again» (Batjargal, 2016, p. 88. Chapter 1).

Due to Wang Mang's faulty policy, the stable Chinese control over the Western Regions was no longer restored. The long distances involved in the fact that the Chinese were not able to intervene militarily to pacify the kingdoms located up to 4-5,000 kilometres from the Han Court. Only a few publication pay attention to the fact that after Wang Mang's reign, the position of the Eastern Han Dynasty which was officially 25 CE by Guang Wu (25-56 CE), was unable to regain direct control over the former Han territories, moreover his reign was instable around until 40 CE. He wanted to renew the old alliance with the southern shanyu in 30 CE, bhe made a diplomatic approach to the Hun, but the Shanyu did not response well. He supported his own candidate, Lu Fang, who belonged to Han-dynasty, but his mother was a Hun princess. He controlled the territory west part of the Yellow river bend, the other candidate Wei Ao occupied the northwestern part. When Wei Ao died around 30 CE, Lu Fang and Guangwu fought with each other over a decade. So, the Hans lost the western territory for almost half a century and the Huns took over control in the western areas. The Hou Han shu summarised that period shortly: «The Xiongnu collected oppressively heavy taxes. The kingdoms were not

able to support their demands. In the middle of the jianwu period [25-55 CE], they each sent envoys to ask if they could submit to the Middle Kingdom, and to express their desire for a Protector General. Emperor Guangwu [25-57 CE], deciding that they had not really come for the sake of the security of the Empire, and that he had no time for outside

The chronicle also states that kings of North Jushi, Shanshan and Yanqi (Karashahr)¹ sent their sons to Emperor Guangwu, who sent them back to the Huns. The Chinese was not strong enough to supervise the area. The Northern Huns have tried to set their own side, peacefully or by force. Therefore the Chinese also wanted to seduce kings of the western regions and they sent huge presents or bribing. The amount of them, however, had to be steadily increased. In 51 BC 8,000 silk rolls were given for such purposes, that amount has already increased to 30,000 rolls by 1 CE. In addition, copper money were given to loyal kings and princes. From the 1st century to the middle of the 2nd century, the whole state budget was 10 billion copper income of which 3 to 4 billion were sent abroad as a gift (Garnet, 2001, p. 117), which means that 30 to 40 percent of the revenues devoted to corruption. However, delivering a huge amount of silk, and other Chinese luxury products only reached its goal in the short term, because the market has been full of silk products, so the price of silk gradually decreased, nobody was interested in it for high price.

From the jianwu period [25-55 CE] communications with the Western Regions were cut three times, and then restored. From the middle of the 1 CE a geopolitical changes has happened: not only Han and Huns struggled for trade rights of the Silk Road, but the divided Huns – Southern and Northern - also wanted to get the control above Wuwei market or the northern route. The two leaders of the Huns were not able to agree who was right to have a title shanyu. From that time or 48 CE two shanyus existed: northern and southern ones. They also fought for territories, because there was no designated border between them. In addition the problems, a long lasting war broke out after Yu shanyu's death (46CE), because he appointed his own son, Punu as shanyu, but the previous shanyu and Nangzhiyasi's son, Bi² (Batjargal, 2016, p. 36) also wanted to be the king. He fought for leadership, and he allied with Han to get it. At last Bi has established an independent state in the northern part of Ordos

¹ North Jushi –Turpan basin, Shanshan –Southerneastern part of Takla Makan , Karashahr – Northwestern part of China

² In the 22 nd year (46CE) Shanyu Lei has died. His son, the left wise king Wu Da Ta became the shanyu. He died soon and after Punu became the new king. Bi became very angry not be elected as shanyu. The next year locusts invasion was int he Northern Hun's teritority, grass and wood dried and the people and animals also starved. Almost the half of the cattles perished.

and submitted to the Han court¹ (Batjargal, 2016, p. 36) We can find information from the Hou Han shu, that Northern Huns regularly attacked the Chinese territory, mainly the sections of the Silk Road, but in case of natural disasters (drought, locusts, etc.) they had to give it up for a while. Regarding that period, the Hou Han shu chronicle recorded events of the invasions of the Huns, they refer to the Northern Huns, who wanted to get the territories of the western part of the Yellow-river. „During the yongping period [58-75 CE], the Northern Savages (i.e., the Northern Huns) forced several countries to help them plunder the commanderies and districts of Hexi. The gates of the towns stayed shut in broad daylight» (Batjargal, 2016, p. 88. Section 1).

After Fu Lang's death the Southern Huns accepted Emperor Guangwu offer and concluded peaceful alliance with Han court again and began protect western markets around He Xi from the Northern Huns, that's why they often attacked the borders and demanded to open border markets (Batjargal, 2016, p. 44).

A fierce war has happened there for the trade rights of the Silk Road, mainly around Wuwei. The western region, like Turpan or Hami had been lost for Han court, although Ban Chao got back and joined to China for a short period. The Chinese historical sources stated confused information about their situation². In the sixteenth year [73 CE], Emperor Ming ordered his generals to lead an expedition north against the Huns in order to get the Western Regions back. According to the Hou Han shu: «Relations with the Western Regions had been cut for sixty-five years [9-73 CE] before they were restored». Ban Chao general began to attack Huns in the Western Region in 73 CE. He successfully chased Huns to the Gobi region and by 91 CE occupied the northern section of the Silk road, two big junctions, Yanqi and Hami as well. Ban Chao took advantage of opposite between the Northern and Southern Huns, who fought each other for controlling the markets of the Silk Road. Shortly after it the commercial dispute between the Huns, a frontier war broke out in present-day Mongolia began in 89 CE, when Southern Huns and Han Chinese wanted to win over Northern Huns in order to pacify HeXi Corridor. Although the literature stated that Han had victories over the Northern Huns, the Chinese sources mentioned that majority of the army consisted

¹ According to the Hou Han shu: „In the fourth year (48AD) springtime 8 leading tribesmen gathered and elected Bi as shanyu. They supported the Han dynasty and tried to concluded peace treaty. They became friend at the border of Wu Yuan and offered to pay taxes and fight with northern robbers.

² Emperor Zhang [76-88 CE], not wishing to exhaust and ruin the Middle Kingdom in the affairs of the Yi and Di, sent for the Mao and Ji Commandants to return, and did not appoint another Protector General. In the second year [77 CE], he abolished the State Farms at Yiwu (Hami). After that, the Xiongnu sent soldiers to supervise Yiwu (Hami). At the same time Division Commander Ban Chao stayed at Yutian (Khotan), pacifying and reuniting all the kingdoms.»

of Huns and allied troops (Wuhuan, Xianbi, etc.). The battle has happened in present-day Mongolia, Yanran-mountain - Dundgobi province, and the Chinese army left led by Dou Xian an inscription in the rock (Zhu 朱, 2017). The two-front war grunted the military power of the Northern Huns for a decade, but he did not stop attacking the Western Regions. After a while he united army and attacked the sections of the Silk Road again. The peace did not last long, short after the Han-Hunnic campaign, Wujuzhan, a member of the royal house of Southern Shanyu, rebelled against the Han in Ordos. It has lasted two years, from 94-96 CE. So, a new location has involved the rebellion against the Han. The governor of He Xi, with 20,000 troops, was fighting the uprising, but sooner there were new ones. Keeping the area inhabited by the northern and steppes peoples has made the Han ever more serious. Rebels meant that northern steppe horsemen did not live under the Han pressure. When Ban Chao was retired in 102 CE, the power of the Xiongnu in the Western Territories increased again, and subsequent Chinese emperors were never able to reach so far to the west. We can find lots of information about rebels in the frontier zones, which meant that Han court is not able to pacify and govern that region. There are several news about the revolts. Following the death of Emperor Xiaohou [in 105 CE], the Western Regions rebelled. From this time, therefore, the Western Regions were abandoned. The Northern Xiongnu immediately took control and united all the kingdoms again. They [the Northern Xiongnu] raided the frontier with their cooperation, for more than ten years. The rebellion of the Western Region has happened shortly after Ban Chao's death¹. After that Qiangs, who lived near the He Xi corridor, rebelled also against the Han, along with other people of the Silk Road, Northern and Southern Huns, Wuhuan and Xianbei, and successfully expelled the Han from the territory of Yaqi for several months in 109 CE.

The Huns and Hans has fought for Turfan or the Northern route again, it was closer to Northern Huns of Gobi. From the *yanguang* period [122-125 CE], communications with the Western Regions were cut three times, and then restored, it depended to the interior relationship of the Huns (Batjargal, 2016, Section 20-27). If they had fight for throne, they lost territories, but if the shanyu established the central power, they attacked Han army and chased them southward. Meanwhile, the Han Court gradually declined. As the *Hou Han shu* writes: «The kingdoms of the

¹ Following the death of Emperor Xiaohou [in 105 CE], the Western Regions rebelled. In the first *yongchu* year [107 CE], of the reign of Emperor An, the Protectors General Ren Shang and Duan Xi, and others, were surrounded and attacked several times. The Imperial Government proclaimed that the post of Protector General should be abolished because these regions were remote, difficult, and dangerous to reach. From this time, therefore, the Western Regions abandoned. The Northern Xiongnu immediately took control and united all the kingdoms again. They [the Northern Xiongnu or HUNs] raided the frontier with their cooperation, for more than ten years. The Governor of Dunhuang, Cao Zong, was concerned about their violence and killings.

Western Regions became arrogant and negligent. They oppressed and attacked each other. Subsequently, Shanshan and Jushi were once again subjected to the Huns. That period Governor of Dunhuang had to send troops against Huns, it was the stable point of Han administration. fought against Huan clan of the Huns. In the 140's, more and more riots broke out against the Han dynasty, the final blow was the rebellion of the Yellow Turbans, which broke out in the 180's and led collapsing of the Han dynasty». The Chinese lost not only western region, but their own power as well, the territory of Han dynasty divided into parts, which were led by warlords and steppe horsemen for hundred years. The Huns and other steppe tribes got back their self-governance along the Silk Road, they established dynasties in the period of Five Barbarians and 16 kingdoms. Despite of old point of view that Han occupied Western Region and ruled it for centuries, we can observe from the contemporary Chinese sources that serious war lasted for that region. Summarising the long lasting relationship between Huns and Han, the commercial war was finally won the Huns and their allies: the Han Dynasty collapsed, and their control over the Western region ended. (Boulnois, 2012, p. 40)

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ХУННЫ И ФРОНТИРНАЯ ПОЛИТИКА КИТАЯ НА ШЁЛКОВОМ ПУТИ

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За последние несколько лет было опубликовано множество работ о Шелковом пути, в которых подчеркивалась роль китайской династии Хань в открытии международного торгового пути. Но большинство из них исследовали вопрос с китайской точки зрения, не уделяя внимание реальной фронтальной ситуации. В своем кратком изложении я попытаюсь обобщить историю фронтальных отношений между китайцами и народами степной зоны на основе китайских исторических записей. Я обнаружила, что шла ожесточенная война между гуннами и китайцами за контроль торговых путей, и местные города присоединялись к ним в соответствии с их экономическими интересами.

Ключевые слова: Шелковый путь, торговля, династия Хань, хунны, сюнну, Таримский бассейн, Коридор Хэси

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