

HUNGARIAN GEOPOLITICS



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**What is exactly the New Silk Road? It is a project which aims at shifting the axis of the world economy from the oceans back to the mainland. The promise lying at the heart of One Belt, One Road is to restore the former economic, political, cultural, historical role of Eurasia...**



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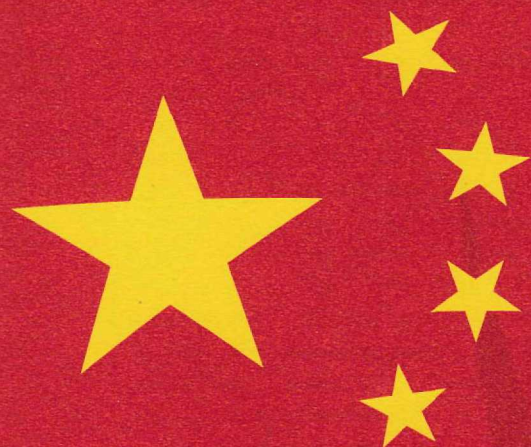
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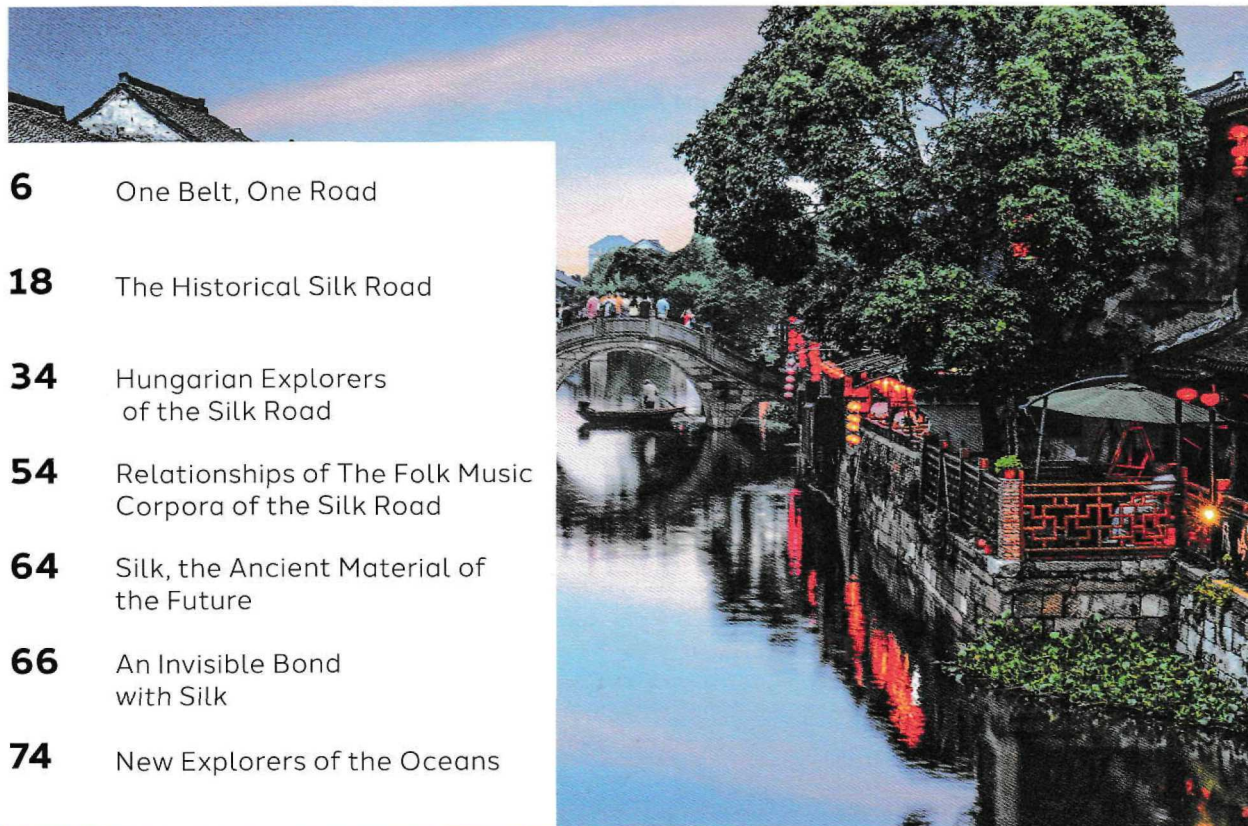
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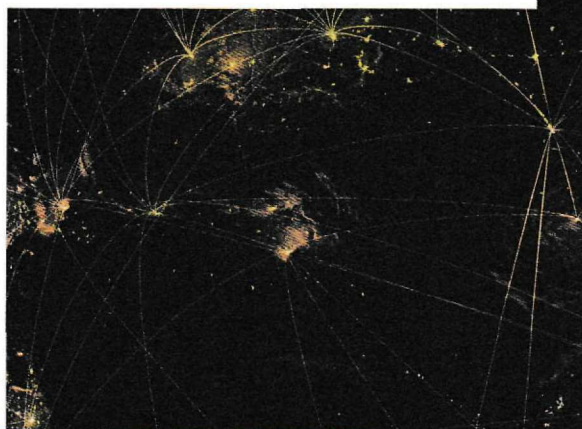
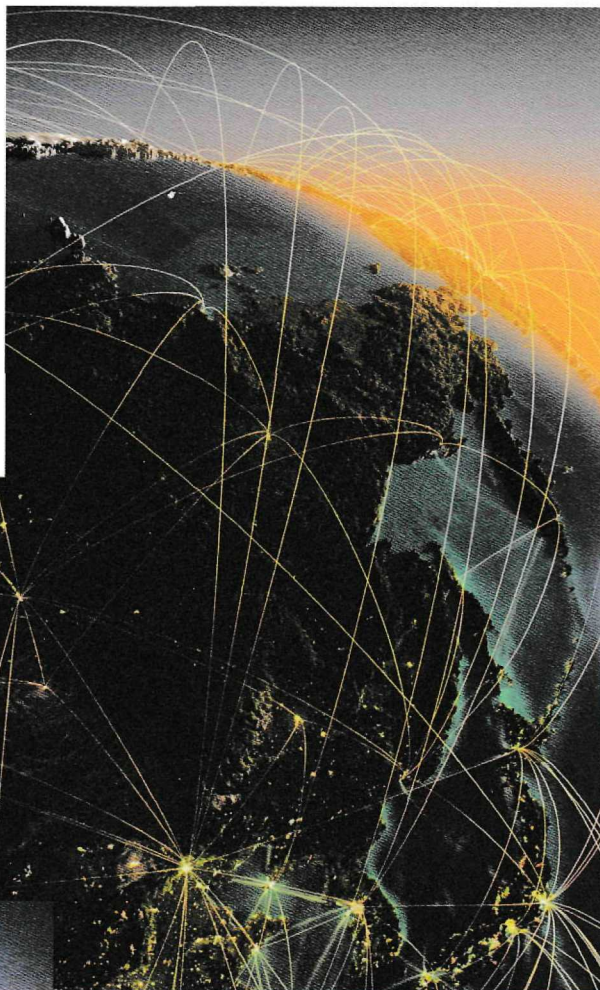
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# RELATIONSHIPS OF THE FOLK MUSIC CORPORA OF THE SILK ROAD

Author: Dr. Atilla Grandpierre

**The evolvement of the Silk Road is one of the greatest achievements of history, because it opened up new horizons for development by creating close links between the greatest ancient cultures. Remarkably, the region of the northern Silk Road is the primary home of pentatonic music. We are going after this relationship in our article.**

Long-distance trade routes always evolve between two interested parties. We know that China was the starting point of the Silk Road. If China was one of the parties, what was the other party? Which was the other, similarly developed civilization with which China was happy to trade? As far as we know today, there were four ancient civilizations: China, India, Mesopotamia and Egypt. None of these is mentioned in connection with the main route of the Silk Road. The excellent Russian archaeologist, Elena Kuzmina, writes in her book "The Prehistory of the Silk Road" published in 2007, that the most important, northern route of the Silk Road was the one which stretched across the Eurasian steppe and, starting in China, it linked Central Asia with the northern coast of the Black Sea for several millennia. What sort of an ancient high culture existed at the other end of the main route of the Silk Road? For us, it is particularly remarkable that pentatonic music is the most characteristic on the Eurasian steppe ranging to the Carpathian Basin on the west, around this important, northern branch of the Silk Road. Pentatonic folk music may be a very important guide to the exploration of this ignored ancient high culture. The Eurasian steppe does not stretch to the northern coast of the Black Sea but to the Carpathian Basin, and pentatonic music survived much more here, in the Carpathian Basin than at the northern coast of the Black Sea. Might an ancient high culture, which has been ignored up to this day, have existed in the Carpathian Basin?

John Noble Wilford wrote in the New York Times in 2009, 'Before the glory that was Greece and Rome, even before the first cities of Mesopotamia or temples along the Nile, there lived in the Lower Danube Valley and the Balkan foothills people who were ahead of their time in art, technology and long-distance trade. New research, archaeologists and historians say, has broadened understanding of this long overlooked culture, which seemed to have approached the threshold of "civilization" status. To some scholars, the people and the region are simply Old Europe. The settlements maintained close contact through networks of trade in copper and gold and also shared patterns of ceramics. A few towns (...) grew to more than 800 acres, which archaeologists consider larger than any other known human settlements at the time.'

The "Old Europe" culture evolved in the Carpathian Basin. It supposedly existed in the period between 6,000 B.C. and 2,400 B.C. Blagoje Govedarica, Professor of Archaeology in Hamburg proved that from 5,100 B.C. the archaeological culture characterised by burying with sceptres had created cultural centres by the Lower Danube, the northern coast of the Black Sea, in the Volga-Kama Interfluvium and in the Caucasus. These cultural centres lived in peace with each other, and had close contact with the regions to the east of the Ural Mountains. In recent decades, it has been revealed that metallurgy was invented in



Old Europe, in the Balkan-Carpathian metallurgical province around 5,5000 B.C. For thousands of years, Old Europe was the European centre of agriculture, metallurgy, housing, refined pottery and high-level stone working. Their descendant peoples were the pre-Scythians and the Scythians. In the last millennium B.C. Ancient Greeks called the entire region of the Eurasian Plain the empire of the Scythians and later that of the Sarmatians, akin to Scythians; Chinese called it the empire of the Huns. In recent decades, we have learnt more and more new information about the extraordinary antiquity, world-class goldsmithery, fascinating zoomorphic art, and legendary wealth of the Eurasian Scythian-Hun civilization. It is getting more and more obvious that in the first millennia BC, there was a civilisation on the Eurasian Plain, which was on a par with the ancient Chinese, Greek, Indian and Egyptian civilisations, and it was even more developed at handicrafts.

## ***This “Old European” culture evolved in the Carpathian Basin.***

In ancient times, when people did not modify their natural environments substantially, physical geographic conditions played a primary role in the development of early civilisations. Fundamental facts of physical geography support the idea that the Eurasian Plain and its surroundings, stretching from the Carpathian Basin to the Pacific Ocean are a particularly favourable area for the birth of civilisations. The northern Silk Road is the artery of the world's largest, most fertile, temperate, ecologically coherent region, the Eurasian Plain, which is several millions square kilometres in extent. This vast area encompassing a distance of about 10,000 kilometres, 14 time zones, numerous large rivers from the Carpathian Basin to the Pacific Ocean along the parallel 45° north, provides similar biogeographical conditions for wildlife. The similar fauna, flora and climate provide similar conditions for mankind. The ecological consistency of fauna and flora provided fundamentally coherent and favourable conditions for the development of humans and the ancient culture. The plain was relatively easy to pass, which facilitated the maintenance of long-distance relationships and the development of culture. It was supported by the



*Similar patterns from the ancient cultures of the Carpathian Basin and China. Peculiar archaeological artefacts demonstrate the commercial and/or cultural relationship between the culture of Old Europe and China's Yang Shao culture. On the left, a clay vessel with a tubular base and interlacing spirals, originating from the archaeological culture of Old Europe can be seen. This archaeological culture is the Erősd-Cucuteni-Trypillian culture; it ranges from Transylvania to the north coast of the Black Sea and the Balkan, and existed from 5,100 to 2,400 B.C. On the right, a very similar clay vessel, decorated with interlacing spirals, can be seen; it is from the Yang Shao culture, which existed at the bend of the Yellow River, around Ordos, the starting point of the Silk Road, from 5,000 to 3,000 B.C. The distance between the two sites is more than 7,000 km.*

greatest achievement of the ancient civilisation, the domestication of the horse, which also evolved in the western half of the Eurasian Plain in the 5th century BC. Transport was revolutionised by the invention of the spoked wheel and the coach – these inventions are also related to the Eurasian Plain. Since, in addition, metallurgy, pottery, large animal husbandry and wholesale cereal production reached the highest degree of development in this region, the surroundings of the Silk Road, from the Pacific Ocean to the Carpathian Basin, seems to be the most developed culture of mankind before the millennia BC.

The entire Eurasian Plain lies in the temperate zone. A significant portion of its soil is extremely fertile black or brown soil, which is the best soil in the world. The weather conditions on the Plain improve from east to west, toward the Carpathian Basin, where they are the most favourable: Mediterranean, Atlantic and continental climates prevail, but none of them outweighs the other. Here, the more extreme, drier climate is replaced by a wet continental one. While the most of the steppe is a plain with bushes and fields but no trees, the Carpathian basin is rich in

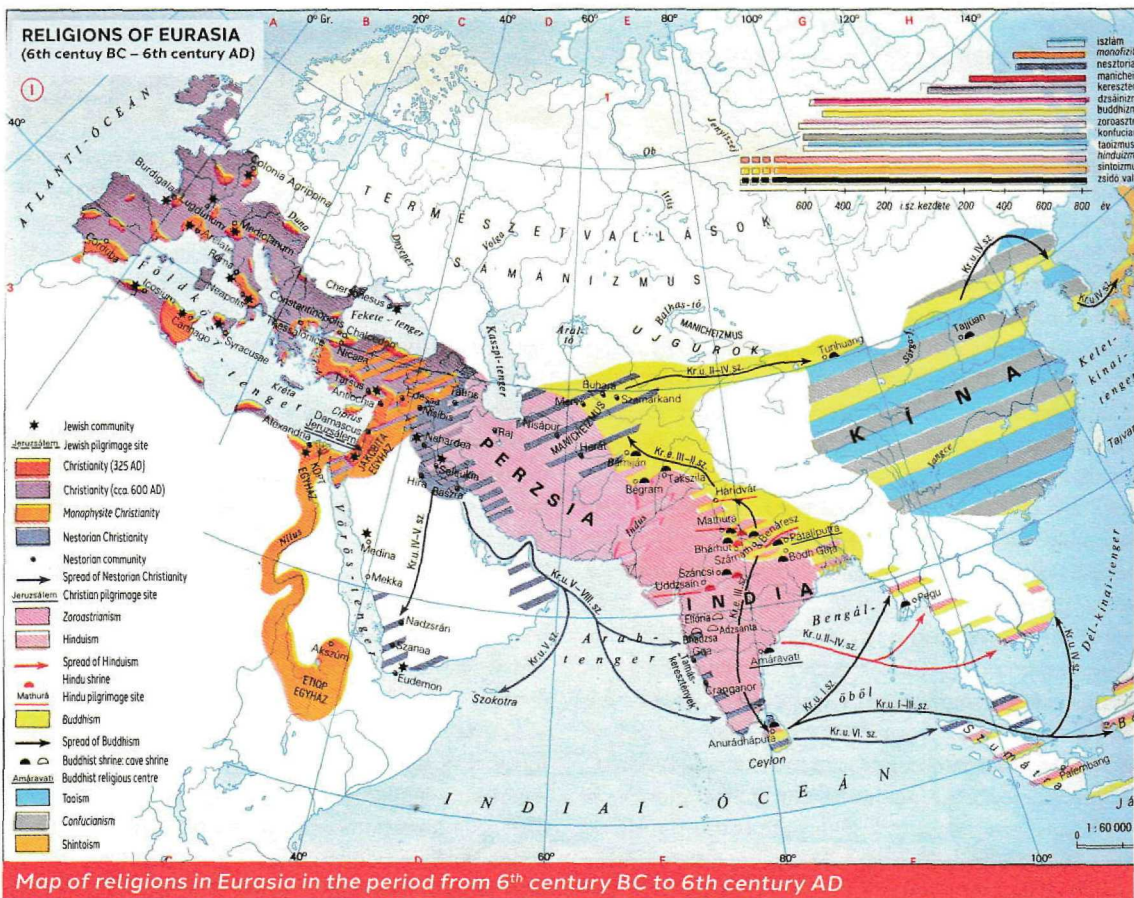


plants and very frequently spotted by trees, groves, forests. The protecting, unifying and balancing effect of the mountains around the Carpathian Basin, which are very rich in minerals, and the two large rivers, the Danube and the Tisza running near each other, the top soil with high humus content, which had formed on a loess cover of 200,000 square kilometres, created favourable conditions for biogeographical factors. Peoples of the steppe therefore tended to migrate westward along the plain, to its more fertile and richer western regions, Encyclopaedia Britannica notes. At the same time, at the other end of the Eurasian Plain, the region of Ordos, almost surrounded by the bend of the Yellow River, provided the best-quality pastures in the East Asian loess region, and it contributed to the significant role that this region played. In addition, the central location of the Carpathian Basin within Europe creates the possibilities of very diverse interactions, both for in- and outflows. The largest, temperate areas rich in loess and nurtured by rivers can be found on the Eurasian steppe, in Central

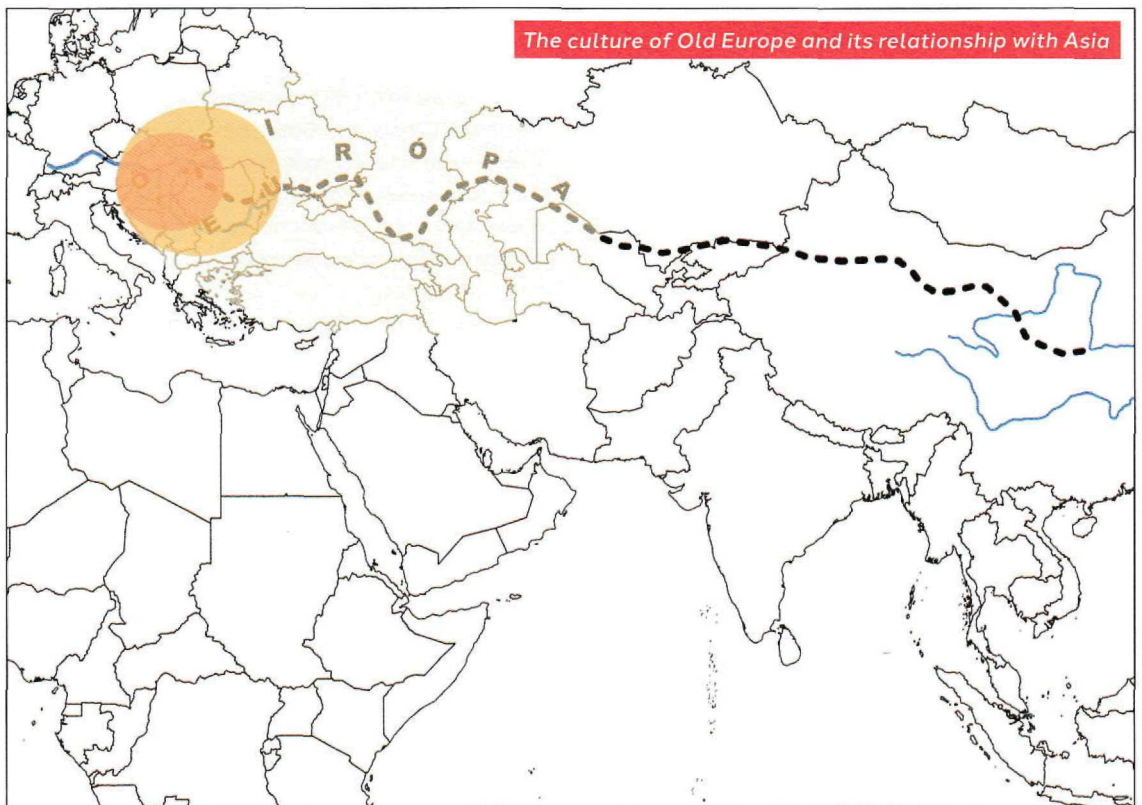
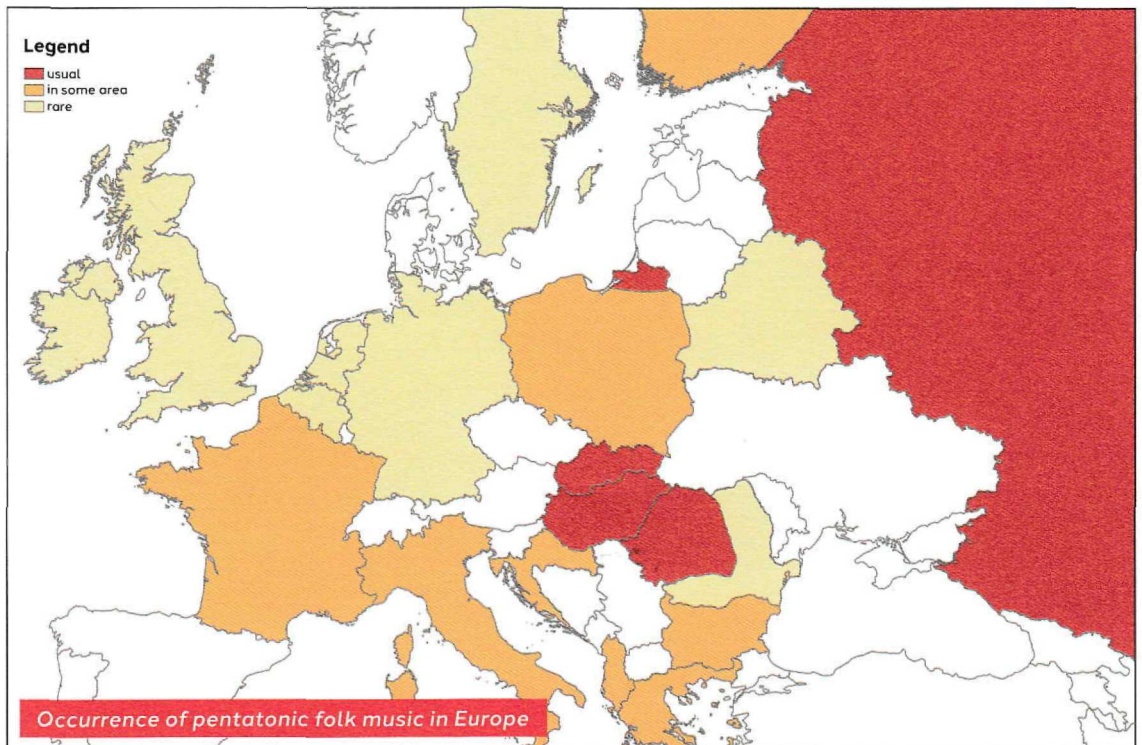
Europe and China, especially along the Yellow River and the Danube Valley – exactly at the places where the pentatonic scale is predominant.

### RESPECT FOR NATURE, RELIGION, PENTATONIC SCALE - COMMON ELEMENTS IN THE CULTURES OF THE PEOPLES ON THE SILK ROAD

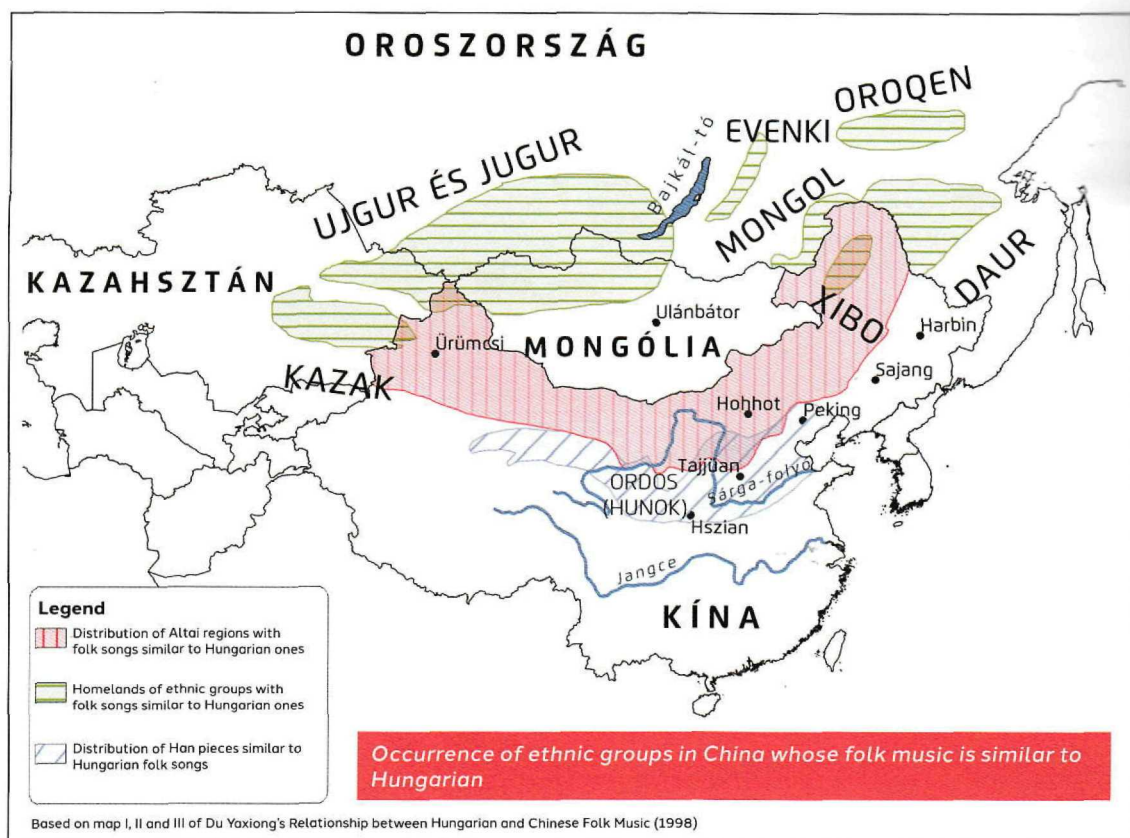
The greatest significance of the Silk Road and its predecessors lies in the spread of ideas culture and technology. We can talk about fundamental similarities as well as significant differences in both the material and intellectual cultures of the different regions. As we look back in time, the culture of the Eurasian steppe and that of East Asia prove to be closer and closer to each other. In 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BC, until 6th century AD, one single religion prevailed in this vast region: the nature religion, or with a modern name, shamanism, or as it was called in its days, the religion of the Magi, which has a history of tens of thousands of years. All signs indicate that before 6th











century BC this ancient religion embraced an even larger area, since Buddhism spread in China from 4<sup>th</sup> to 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC, and Taoism managed to preserve ancient traditions. Even before the dawn of the Chinese religion (!) the religion of the Magi might have had an organised clergy (de Groot, 1982, VI, II:1187). In the millennia BC, the Magi had a leading role on all levels of the Chinese religion (Schafer, 2005, 234). Folk music is often more permanently preserved than religion. The region of the nature religion stretching from Scandinavia and the Danube Valley to Southeast Asia apparently corresponds to the region of pentatonic folk music. Bence Szabolcsi concludes that "the scattered and faded traces of the vast musical language chain (of the pentatonic scale) can be tracked from the Lapp Peninsula and Transdanubia and from the Caucasus and the Volga regions down to the coasts of East and Southeast Asia."

#### PENTATONIC FOLK MUSIC IN EUROPE

It is often said that pentatonic music can be found all over the world. Consequently, we could think that the pentatonic nature of Hungarian folk music is not

a Hungarian peculiarity. But this would be misleading. On the one hand, in Europe pentatonic music is common in the Carpathian Basin, in present-day Slovakia, Transylvania and, regarding children's songs, in Russia, with some of its ethnic groups. Furthermore, it was preserved in Irish, Welsh and Scottish folk music – but it is not common anywhere else.

The development of the pentatonic scale, according to latest research, is closely related to archery. The single-stringed musical bow developed into double-stringed then multiple-stringed musical bows, harps and other stringed instruments. The simplest version of the musical bow has one single string, and the oral cavity of the musician serves as the soundbox. The first harps had a bow-shape. The first known depiction of the instrument can be seen in one of the drawings on the walls of the cave in Les Trois Frères, Southern France. It was made approx. 15,000 year ago. Today, similar ancient images are found in Siberia, China and India.

The bow has a history of at least 40,000 years, according to archaeological finds discovered in the Carpathian Basin, in Istálló-kő and Upper-Hungary.





The region ranging from the Carpathian Basin to the Pacific Ocean was the primary habitat of bow people, which corresponds to the primary regions of shamanism where the idea that music has cosmic magical power is rooted. It was proven that ancient Mesopotamian and Egyptian harps were pentatonic. Five, more than 30,000-year old bone flutes, able to produce five sounds, were found in the cave of Istállós-kő in the Carpathian Basin (László Zolnay). Along the Yellow River in China, in the Jiahu site next to Ordos, a more than 9,000 year-old flute made of a bird's hollow bone has been recently discovered. The flute demonstrates a high level of tonality and mathematical knowledge. The people of Jiahu knew the sound scales and were able to shape the holes of the flute to produce the appropriate pitch (Zhang et al., 1998). It can play the pentatonic folk song "Little cabbage", still popular in North China; its Hungarian counterpart is the folk song "Orphaned bird" (Yaxiong 1998, 34). A pan flute from 8<sup>th</sup> century BC, found near Przeczyce, South Poland (Silesia), also played the pentatonic scale (Hegyi 2012)..

#### **PENTATONIC FOLK MUSIC IN CHINA**

China is one of the most ancient homelands of pentatonic music. Bence Szabocsi concluded, that at the bottom of the history of Chinese music there seemed to be minor-pentatonic tunes ("Yu-Chou" scale system). Apparently, the old "Si King" contained a high number of minor-pentatonic tunes. (Szabolcsi Bence 1934). According to Chinese tradition, it was Ling-Lun, one of the wise men of Huang Di, who brought this nature-based musical system of the pentatonic scale from the northwest in 3<sup>rd</sup> millennia BC. According to Chinese records, Yu, that is the la-pentatonic key, also fundamental in Hungarian folk music, was very predominant in the northern part of China in 5<sup>th</sup> century BC. (Du Yaxiong 1998, 11).

It has long been known that the oldest-seeming strata of Chinese and Mongolian music might have a relationship with the tunes of the Volga region and Hungary. Yang Yinliu, professor of the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing, considered it very likely that the minor pentatonic scale (the "la-mode", as he called it) had radiated more powerfully from



the northeast into Chinese music. The style of north-eastern Chinese music was called the "Gansu music dialect" (Gansu is a Chinese province including much of the Ordos district and areas to its northwest). The Hungarian tunes in Chinese folk music form a part of it. The pentatonic scale without semitones is indigenous in the Carpathian Basin, with the Turkic-Tatar peoples living on the Russian steppe and in China (Kodály 1982, 24). We should remember that the relationship between Chinese and Hungarian folk music is much stronger than the relationship between Chinese and Japanese folk music (ibid, 50). Lu Hongjiu concluded that the folk music of Ordos was rooted from the Huns. According to Chinese tradition, the music system of the Ordos region is based on the nature-based theoretical system already known 5,000 years ago (Szabolcsi 1934).

Regarding the relationship with Hungarian folk music, we can distinguish three districts in North China, where the folk songs of the inhabitants, namely the ethnic groups living in China, the Altai peoples, and the Han people, are similar to those of Hungarians: The existence of the common source of Chinese and Hungarian folk music is confirmed by the latest results of comparative ethnomusicology. Zoltán Juhász distinguished more than 1,000 types of folk songs by a computer-based analysis of more than 50,000 tunes collected from 44 ethnic groups, on the basis of the melody contours. He found six cultures of folk music based on the frequency distribution of the different melody contours, within which the musical types of the various ethnic groups are about ten times closer to each other than the types of the different cultures are to each other. Out of the six folk musical cultures, the "Ancient Language" culture can be found in 50 tune types of the Chinese, Volga, Sicilian, Turkish, Karachay, Hungarian, Romanian, Dakota, Andean, Kazakh, Szekler folksongs; the "Oriental" culture is included in 70 tune types of the Chinese, Mongolian, Volga, Sicilian, Andean, Kazakh and Hungarian folk songs. The "Oriental" culture range from China to the Volga region, while the "Ancient Language" one from China to Asia Minor and the Carpathian Basin. The computer-based analyses showed quantitatively and explicitly that the same musical principles underlay the musical system of the Carpathian Basin, the Volga region and China (Juhász 2008, 84). Of all folk music cultures, the only folk music culture with which Chinese music has direct relationship is the Hungarian (Juhász 2006,

141). There are only an insignificant number of types in the folk music of China and the Volga region which the Hungarian folk music lacks; the other way round, however, the common melody types of the folk music of China and the Volga region are richer in Hungarian folk music, and form a more complete system. The direct relationship between Chinese and Hungarian folk music, manifesting in so many melody types, is possible only if a significant group of our ancestors permanently lived in the neighbourhood of China (Juhász 2006, 146). The folk music of the Hungarian people, which is related to that of the Chinese, Turkish, Chuvash, Tatars, Maris, Karachays and Indians, serves as the fundamental strata of the "Ancient Language" folk music culture. The highest proportion and diversity of this fundamental strata occurs in the Szekler database and among Hungarian type melodies. (Juhász 2016, 232). For archaeological, genetical and historical reasons, Juhász supposes that this "Ancient Language" folk music culture, including 50 melody types, is more than 12,000 years old. Pentatonic folk music still plays an important role in China, Hungary, Slovakia, Romania, Russia, Mongolia, Kazakhstan, with the Khakass living in the Minusinsk Basin, the Maris (Cheremis) living by the Volga, in Tuva, with the Caucasian Karachays and Balkars, in Southeast Asia, with the Kalmyks, in Chuvashia, the Nogay Tatars, in Korea and Japan.

#### **COMMON ELEMENTS ALONG THE SILK ROAD IN THE MUSIC CULTURES OF TODAY'S PEOPLES**

The Silk Road has a history of several thousand years. In this vast, ecologically coherent area, where the fauna, the flora and the climate are fundamentally the same, man-made world springs from a common slant of life and mindset. The high-level culture about which we can have a more comprehensive picture with the help of traces emerging in recent years, has common roots.

This fundamentally common natural environment resulted in the development of an extremely rich common musical world in folk music, to express the slant of life. It is a fact that this is the region where pentatonic music was born and has been flourishing for millennia, from the Carpathian Basin to the Pacific Ocean and North India.

In his book entitled "The Five World Religions" (1975, 141), Helmuth von Glasenapp writes, that the basic idea behind Chinese ideology is the harmony of the sky, the Earth and man. One of the most beautiful



sections of the Shujing (I, 4) says, "There is the most intimate relationship between the Heavens up and the men down, and who recognises this in its entirety is really sage." This cosmic ideology is reflected in ancient folk music as well. According to the ancient Chinese concept of music, music is the gift of the Heavens, its basic principles derive from the laws of the Universe and is capable of having immense impact on people.

Béla Bartók writes, "Folk music is a phenomenon of nature that evolves with the organic freedom of other living organisms in nature: flowers, animals, etc." – and as we could see, the fauna and flora form one unit in this vast area being the largest coherent region of the world, just like the ancient strata of pentatonic folk music. "Real peasant music is transformative work of a natural force operating unconsciously in peoples not influenced by urban culture" (Bartók 1925, At the sources of folk music). The same drive makes the songbirds sing and creates folk music in people: the instinct to create music, which penetrates nature and implies high-level intellectual activity.

Béla Bartók recognised that the pentatonic nature of folk music is a natural phenomenon. The pentatonic scale is a natural phenomenon, it is an important, although not exclusive, characteristic of birdsongs. Ornithologists have shown that the non-exclusive but extremely frequent features of birdsong include: the minor pentatonic scale, fifth transposition, descending melody line, choriambus. Interestingly, these are also the main characteristics of the ancient strata of Hungarian and Chinese folk music, that is, they do rely on natural principles. The woodlark sings melodies of a chromatising tone system and with fifth transposition. Pentatonic, diatonic and other "human" tone systems have also developed in the avifauna. A hermit thrush often sings minor pentatonic songs.

It is not only the pentatonic scale which connects the folk music of the Silk Road and the pentatonic nature of birdsongs. We can find a whole series of elaborate matches if we get acquainted with birdsongs. Our ancestors paid close attention to Nature for millennia, during the entire unfathomable past, until the dawn of becoming humans. In his book entitled "The Origins and the Three Worlds of Music", Péter Szőke birdsong-researcher showed that the emphasised role of the fifth transposition, the descending tone, the sharp and drawn rhythms, the pentatonic scale

without semitones, the four-line verses and the descending melody line and the harmonic dominant-tonic relationship, well-known in European folk music were also displayed in birdsongs. A series of avian musical facts, proven by experiences, confirm that no matter how developed human music is, the basic creative principles of human folk music can be detected in the music of the birds, and this is evidenced by a multitude of samples from avian music (Szőke 1982, 69).

In addition, the extraordinary phenomenon of the folk song threshold also connects Hungarian and Chinese folk music. Approximately half of the North Chinese folk songs still contains the folk song threshold (xing), known to the Chinese for at least 3,000 years, according to the "Book of Verses" (Du Yaxiong 1998, 44). The threshold, which is characteristic of both Hungarian and Chinese folk songs, means that at the birth of such folk music a phenomenon of Nature found an intimate echo in the soul of the singer, and this inner echo initiates the birth of the folk song. It means that such folk songs were born from an intimate perception of Nature. All these signs together indicate that ancient Eurasian folk music was born not only from the instinct to create music, which penetrates the avian world as well, but from an essentially deeper apprehension, intimate experience and respect of Nature.

On his tour of collecting folk songs in Szeklerland in 1907, Bartók suspected the identical tone of the ancient Chinese and ancient Szekler folk music. The work of the subsequent decades supported his suspicion. In 1937 Kodály wrote, "such striking substantial similarities of the melodic structure, phraseology, and rhythm cannot be sheer coincidences. We should suppose contact or a common source here." Kodály's standpoint in 1947 demonstrates how deeply he saw the fundamental role of folk music in our national self-identity: "To sustain the unbroken ancient Hungarian spirit manifesting in old melodies, to refresh where it languishes: the whole problem of the survival of Hungarians can be condensed into this single task" (Kodály 1949). The world-famous Kodály method was created for these reasons; its pedagogical concept was regarded as a nation-saving programme by Kodály. The similarly sounding melodies along the Danube, the Volga and the Yellow River, over fifteen hundred years and many thousands of kilometres, convey the same message to us: "we live until we remember who we are" (Kodály 1942).