The Silk Road has been a phenomenal road network channeling peoples, cultures, and goods between East Asia and the Mediterranean World since the Han Dynasty (206BC-220AD). New excavation materials, however, indicate that this road network came into use much earlier. This lecture will present fresh excavation data from the Heishuiguo site, a Chalcolithic and Bronze Age settlement (2100-1600BC) near Zhangye, which was an important military outpost and commercial town in the middle of the Hexi Corridor, a crucial section of the Silk Road. The four-season excavations at Heishuiguo up to 2013 have produced ample materials to manifest the vibrant transmission of mudbrick architecture, domesticated wheat, barley, and sheep and cow from Central Asia, copper metallurgy from the Eurasian steppe, painted pottery technology and domesticated millet from the Yellow River valley, and cowry shell from the south. As a venue of human and cultural traffic, the Silk Road began to function already in the prehistoric period.

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*Sponsored by the Dept. of Anthropology, Dept. of Central Eurasian Studies, Dept. of East Asian Languages and Cultures, the East Asian Studies Center, and the Glenn Black Laboratory of Archaeology.*