

Non-Fiction

Group 1



Famous Travelers on the Silk Road

St. Joseph's Primary School, Yuan Ka Him – 8

The Silk Road was established about twenty-two centuries ago. It was an important network that allowed people to exchange wonderful goods, remarkable inventions, stunning art, and creative ideas between East and West. Many brave and curious travelers traversed the Silk Road, and their journey left a lasting mark on history.

Zhang Qian (Han Dynasty)

Zhang Qian was a renowned diplomat and traveler of the Han dynasty in China. In 139 BCE, the Chinese Emperor Wudi sent Zhang Qian west to make an alliance with the people of Central Asia. Zhang Qian left from Chang'an and headed westward. Early in his journey, he was captured by Xiongnu and held prisoner for over ten years. After escaping, he continued traveling westward to Central Asia. The people there were unwilling to ally with the Han Dynasty against Xiongnu. So Zhang Qian returned to China, he brought with invaluable knowledge of the cultures, goods and geography of Central Asia. He forged the Silk Road. Because of that, trade between East and West began to grow. Today Zhang Qian is often called the "Father of the Silk Road" for his role in bridging East and West.

Xuan Zang (Tang Dynasty)

Xuan Zang was a Buddhist monk during the Tang Dynasty. In 629 CE, he traveled westward along the Silk Road to seek the true teachings of the Buddha. He walked across deserts and climbed over snowy mountains, facing great danger many times. Finally, he arrived in India, the birthplace of Buddhism. After studying in India for over ten years, he brought back over 600 Buddhist books to China. The "Records of the Western Regions" was written by Xuan Zang, based on his extensive 17 years journey to India and Central Asia. This book is a very detailed record of the geography, cultures, peoples, languages, and religions of over a hundred lands he passed through. His journey was a very important event in the history of Buddhism, and it also had a profound impact on the culture, regions and knowledge exchanges along the Silk Road.

Marco Polo (Yuan Dynasty)

Marco Polo was an Italian traveler who lived during China's Yuan Dynasty. In 1271, when he was 17, he left Venice with his father and uncle. They traveled east along the Silk Road. After a gruelling journey of over three years, they finally arrived in China. China was more advanced than Europe in many ways. He saw people using paper money, burning coal for heat. Marco Polo was amazed by what he saw. During his time in China, he traveled to many places and learned about the way people lived there. After about 17 years, he went back to Italy. There he met a writer who turned Marco's stories of his travels into a book called *The Travels of Marco Polo*. This book was full of exciting stories about the East. It became one of the most famous travelogues of all time. For people in Europe, it was the first time they learned how rich and advanced China was. His book made many Europeans curious about Asia. This made many people in Europe want to travel along the Silk Road and explore the Asia.

There were many other famous travelers on the Silk Road, such as Fa Xian, Ibn Battuta, Odoric of Pordenone ...Even though they were from different countries and backgrounds, their footsteps linked the world together. They wrote the glorious chapters of the Silk Road history.

The Enduring Legacy of China's Silk Road

St. Paul's Co-educational College Primary School, Yiu Wing Audrey – 9

The Silk Road, an ancient network of trade routes spanning Asia and Europe, represents one of history's most remarkable conduits for human connection. Emerging over 2,000 years ago, it transcended mere commerce to become an interconnection for exchanging exquisite foods, groundbreaking inventions, beautiful art, and innovative ideas between East and West. People were really curious and wanted to share with one another, so it felt like an exciting adventure around the world, connecting far-off places and changing things in amazing ways!

Pioneers of the Ancient Pathway

This extraordinary linkage was spearheaded by the intrepid Chinese diplomat Zhang Qian. In 138 BC, he embarked from the imperial capital of Chang'an (modern-day Xi'an) on a daring westward quest. Traversing unforgiving deserts and territories held by adversaries, he endured captivity for over a decade before returning with invaluable insights into Western regions. His adventure mapped out the main path through Central Asia, encouraging traders to team up in safe camel groups and create a busy two-way trade road that made Chang'an the biggest city in the world.

A Tapestry of Cultural and Material Exchange

Beyond silk and spices, the Silk Road pulsed with intellectual and cultural vitality. China exported porcelain and tea while importing glass and wool; crucially, its Four Great Inventions—paper, printing, gunpowder, and the compass—along with silkworm cultivation techniques, disseminated westward. Ideologically, Buddhism journeyed from India to China, while Christianity, Islam, Arab astronomy, and medicine flowed eastward, enriching societies on both ends. For more than 1,500 years, this pathway flourished, drawing in adventurers like the 13th-century Venetian traveler Marco Polo, whose stories sparked wonder across Europe. However, by the mid-1400s, safer sea routes and changing political landscapes caused it to slowly fade away.

The Revival: A Modern Renaissance

In 2013, China revitalized this legacy through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), reimagining the Silk Road with contemporary infrastructure and partnerships. Encompassing land “belts” and maritime “roads,” it has engaged over 150 nations, emerging as the largest international trade endeavor in history. Projects like the China-Laos Railway—a “Golden Avenue”—have slashed delivery times for goods, such as Thai durians reaching China in four days, while transporting over 34 million tons of cargo. From Pakistani highways to cultural exchanges like Arabic-dubbed Chinese media, the BRI fosters multifaceted collaboration.

Future Horizons: What the New Silk Road Could Achieve

As the world advances amid growing globalization and faces major challenges like climate change, the BRI offers great promise in promoting sustainable growth and shared success for all. With multi-million investments, it can address infrastructure deficiencies in emerging economies, thereby enhancing global trade through improved connectivity between Asia and Europe and alleviating funding shortages in developing countries. Politically and economically, it may confer advantages to China while elevating regions in Africa, the Middle East, and Asia via upgraded infrastructure, designated economic zones, and strengthened cultural linkages. In the future, the BRI could support green energy projects, foster international partnerships in public health, and drive inclusive economic progress, ultimately creating a more unified and robust global community.

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Echoes Across the Ocean: The Living Legacy of Zheng He in Africa

YK Pao School Shanghai, Zhu Kiu Yin Norah – 9

Do you believe there are Chinese descendants in Africa? What if I told you these descendants have lived on African soil for over 600 years? And isn't it remarkable that, across centuries and continents, they never stopped searching for their roots in China?

In 2004, a girl named Sharif wrote a letter to the Chinese Embassy in Kenya, claiming she was a descendant of Zheng He (郑和)'s sailors. Sharif came from Siyu Village on Pate Island, an isolated community home to more than a thousand residents, many of whom bear striking physical resemblances to southern Chinese people. Oral history tells that, in the early 15th century, when Zheng He's fleet reached the East African coast, two of his ships were wrecked in a storm near Pate island. Around twenty Chinese sailors survived and made landfall on the island. They earned the local people's respect by killing a monster python. Unable to return to their motherland, the sailors integrated into the local community, married islanders, and started new lives. Over time, their presence left subtle but lasting traces. Some families still preserve shards of ancient Chinese porcelain, believed to have been carried by their ancestors. In the letter, Sharif expressed her wish to visit China.

The Chinese ambassador took Sharif's request seriously. In 2005, at the age of 19, Sharif fulfilled her dream. She got admitted to the Nanjing University of Chinese Medicine, becoming the first Kenyan student at this institution. After graduation, rather than staying in China for better opportunities, she returned to Kenya to serve her people as a doctor – mirroring her ancestors' legacy of compassion and service.

Sharif's story is more than a tale of lineage; it's a testament to what heritage truly means. Despite centuries of separation, these descendants held onto a quiet, persistent longing to reconnect with their ancestral homeland. For the Chinese, family and origin are sacred. No matter how far one travels, the question "Where do I come from?" remains central to identity. This story also embodies the deeper meaning of the Silk Road. Yes, it was once a network for trading silk, spices, and porcelain. But its true legacy lies in the exchange of cultures, values, and human connections. Six hundred years ago, Zheng He brought treasures to Africa – but his stranded sailors left behind something even more enduring: resilience, compassion, and integrity. These intangible gifts took root, merged with local traditions, and continue to live on in the hearts and lives of people like Sharif.

Today, the silk has faded. The spices have long since vanished. The porcelain lies broken. But the spirit of those who sailed so far endures – not in museums or textbooks, but in living communities where memory outlives material things. The story of Pate Island reminds us that the greatest legacy of the Silk Road is not what was traded, but what was shared – and remembered.



Creative Writing
Non-Fiction

Group 1

Silk Road Wonderings

The King's School Qianhai Shenzhen, Benson Luen – 8

Have you ever wondered why people call it the Silk Road? It's not just a road. It was a route for many travellers in old days. People used it to trade things with other countries. China mostly traded silk, but they also traded cloth and other goods, such as wheat, tea, and precious stones.

A really big thing happened on the Silk Road. It was called the Black Death. More than 75 million people died in the 1350s because it spread so fast. People were scared, but some people still believed in themselves and kept travelling and trading. That's how the Silk Road became important in history.

The Silk Road lasted for a very long time. Many people, like traders and soldiers, travelled on it. There were robbers who tried to steal precious goods from travellers, so soldiers protected them. Some people even got sick along the way. There were caravansaries every 20 to 25 miles so travellers could rest. Monks also established temples along the way, where people could pray for good luck and safety.

Now, let's imagine we are in the future! In 2026, I saw road builders laying train tracks along the Silk Road. Suddenly, a newspaper blew past me, and I caught it. "Hey kid, you shouldn't be here!" one of the builders shouted. The newspaper showed that the Silk Road now has trains! Some trains can travel all the way to Rome, and some even have robots inside!

Then there were loud noises like hammers—boom, boom! Suddenly, a sandstorm came and everyone, including the road builders, fled away. "Run! The sandstorm is coming!" shouted one of the builders. I jumped into my time machine and travelled to the year 4530. There were flying cars and tall buildings everywhere. The Silk Road looked so different, but people were still travelling and trading, just in new ways!

The Silk Road has a really long history, from the past to the future! I find it amazing. The travellers who travelled on the Silk Road were very brave, and they inspired us to be brave too.

Zhang Qian and the Silk Road

The King's School Qianhai Shenzhen, Dastan Gu – 7

Zhang Qian went to the Silk Road. When he went to the middle of the Silk Road, he was captured. He was caught for ten years. After ten years, he continued the Silk Road adventure.

Sometimes Zhang Qian saw bad guys, and the bad guys stole Zhang Qian's things, but Zhang Qian was not afraid. Zhang Qian went all across the Silk Road. Zhang Qian asked the King of Rome if they could help China defeat the bad guys, but the King of Rome said they couldn't help them. Zhang Qian was very sad and went back to the Silk Road, but this time Zhang Qian knew he would find a road to get back. However, he was still caught by the bad guys.

This time, the king of the bad guys took Zhang Qian to a place that had a lot of sheep. The king of the bad guys said, "If you can make these sheep have more sheep, you can go." But Zhang Qian knew all the sheep were boys. He stayed there for one year. If he was hungry, he ate some leaves. One night, Zhang Qian took his camel and left in the morning.

Zhang Qian went back to China. The people were happy that Zhang Qian was back. Zhang Qian told the master all of his story. He brought some horses back, and the people gave Zhang Qian a big party.

Non-Fiction

Group 2



Silk Road: A Journey Through Time

German Swiss International School, Samar Agrawal – 10

INTRODUCTION

138 BCE. What we know as Modern China did not exist. The middle kingdom was ruled by warring clans and tribes, with the Han dynasty being the most powerful. The Han Dynasty was at war with the nomadic Xiongnu people. Fearing defeat, Emperor Wu sent an explorer, Zhang Qian, to the west to contact potential allies against the Xiongnu. How these events led to the establishment of the Silk Road, is a fascinating tale.

Even before the Silk Road was founded, ancient China had some maritime trade linkages with South and South East Asia as well as land trade with empires in Central Asia, Persia and Rome with silk, spices and horses being major traded goods. However, trade and cultural exchanges truly bloomed after the Silk Road came into existence.

HAN'S BATTLE WITH THE XIONGNU

Emperor Wu of Han was one of the leading figures in China's history. He significantly expanded the Han's sphere of influence through military campaigns into central Asia, Korea and Vietnam. He centralized imperial authority, established Confucianism as a state philosophy, developed imperial academies, civil service exams and supported arts, literature and cultural exchanges. His 54-year reign was momentous and changed China's trajectory. However, his most enduring legacy was the establishment of the Silk Road.

Towards the beginning of his reign, Emperor Wu faced an intractable foe in the form of the Xiongnu who controlled modern day Inner Mongolia. They were a powerful tribe of nomadic people who frequently raided Chinese settlements throughout the Qin and Han dynasties and thwarted Emperor Wu's attempts to expand commercial ties with the West.

After overtures for peace were rejected, Emperor Wu finally declared war on the Xiongnu in 133 BCE. The Xiongnu had made enemies with many other tribes, primarily the Yuezhi in modern day Tajikistan, who they had displaced. Emperor Wu decided to send an emissary to contact the Yuezhi and woo them to join his alliance against the Xiongnu. He chose Zhang Qian, an experienced military officer and diplomat to be his envoy.

ZHANG QIAN'S TWO MISSIONS

Zhang Qian (195-114 BCE) was a Chinese military officer who is best known for his work on creating the Silk Road. Often called the Father of the Silk Road, Zhang was sent on two missions to find allies to help with China's battle against the Xiongnu.

In 138BCE, Zhang led a party of one hundred men and a guide, but early in his journey, he was captured by the Xiongnu and enslaved for 13 years. He ultimately escaped and contacted the Yuezhi but they rebuffed Emperor Wu's entreaties. Although Zhang Qian didn't find any allies he returned with tales of riches, advanced civilizations and huge cities that he encountered through his travels across Central Asia, Tajikistan and all the way to Uzbekistan. This further fueled Emperor Wu's desire to establish trading ties with the wider world.

In 119 BCE, Emperor Wu dispatched Zhang to form a military alliance with the Wusun as well as explore routes to India, following the intelligence gathered on the first mission. Zhang was able to initiate relations with Persia, found new routes to India, making this mission more successful than the last. After the second mission, Wu urgently pressed his military into the Hexi corridor, defeated the Xiongnu and secured the key routes for traders.

Thus the Silk Road was born.

THE SILK ROAD: 1500 YEARS OF DOMINANCE

The Silk Road started in Chang-an/ Xian and stretched through Central Asia (Pamirs, Kashgar, Samarkand, Bukhara) to Persia, Anatolia and Mediterranean Ports. It was not a single road but a complex web including overland caravan routes and sea routes connecting to India, Africa and beyond.

The Silk Road was named after the high quality Chinese silk that was sought after in Europe and Central Asia, but that was not the only thing that passed through the Silk Road. Spices, tea, paper and porcelain were also key items that flowed east to west while China imported horses, glassware, textiles, weapons. Religions (Islam, Buddhism), philosophies, art and technologies (papermaking, gunpowder) also spread through these routes. Intrepid travelers like Marco Polo traveled along the Silk Road to get to Cathay (northern China) and meet the Yuan Emperor, Kublai Khan.

It is also now believed that the Black Death also travelled along these routes. These routes were also key targets for groups like the Huns (who were believed to have descended from the Xiongnu) who attacked merchants along the way.

The Silk Road was a major part of trade across Eurasia for over 1500 years. However, with the passage of time, issues such as safety started deterring merchants. In a major disruption, 1453 CE, the Ottoman empire flexed its control over the route to challenge the dominance of Europeans and imposed high taxes on the lucrative routes. This spelled a death knell for the traditional Silk Road networks as Europeans set out to find alternate routes to Asia, creating a lasting shift in global trade patterns and launching a new age of exploration. The Mongol- led Yuan Dynasty revived it for some time but when the Ming Dynasty came to power, they cut off China from the outside world and the silk road died out, till it received a new lease of life centuries later.

SILK ROAD TODAY

In 2013 China's president, Xi Jinping, revived it with the Belt and Road Initiative. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is China's attempt at creating trade with developing countries. The BRI will help China by bolstering existing alliances and creating new ones as well as developing the more remote parts of China like the Xinjiang autonomous area and Tibet.

China will share its wealth and expertise in building infrastructure such as power plants, ports, railway systems and highways, to assist developing countries and build strong financial trade and cultural linkages just like the original Silk Road once did.

I Am the New Silk Road

Heep Yunn Primary School, Yiu Tsz Yin Ariadne – 11

In a world filled with conflict, like the current wars in Gaza and Ukraine, the New Silk Road reminds us of a path towards harmony. For me, the Silk Road isn't just part of history books. It is the space between my dinner table. To my left, my father's perfect English, tinted with a Danish accent, articulated the details of his workday. To my right, my mother's Cantonese flowed melodically as she shared her Chinese family stories. And there I sit, their mixed child living in Hong Kong, sometimes feeling like a puzzle with missing pieces, unsure which culture I actually belong to. When the competition theme, *New Tales of China's Silk Road*, was announced, I knew I had to share my story. I see myself as the living connection bridging my mother's rich Chinese traditions with my father's Danish roots. Just as the Silk Road once carried goods and cultures between East and West, my identity embodies a blend of both cultures too. In June, we celebrate Sankt Hans Aften by gathering around bonfires. In February, we wear red to celebrate Chinese New Year. Both these holidays bring so much joy to my family as both celebrate togetherness, a value which we treasure. I believe the New Silk Road is just like me. It's not merely a trade route but proof that the most enduring connection is human unity, when our strengths can be amplified.

My research began as a quest for understanding. I delved into the history of the ancient Silk Road and discovered that it was never just about silk. It was the first great sprawling network for ideas. The very paper this is printed on? It was invented in China and travelled west, revolutionising communication. And the mathematical concepts that power my father's projects? They were shared by Indian thinkers and carried by Arab scholars along these routes. And the spices that flavoured my mother's cooking? They were once worth their weight in gold, transported by merchants who braved deserts and mountains. And the intricate floral patterns on the ceramic bowl holding my soup? The cobalt pigment was mined in Persia, traded east to Jingdezhen, and fired by Chinese artisans into porcelain. The Silk Road was the world's first internet, a slow but magnificent route of cultural and intellectual exchange.

In that moment of historical clarity, my own world snapped into focus. At bedtime, my mother would share folklore from China, while my father would recount tales of Viking adventures, blending history and imagination from both worlds. At dinner, my mother's traditional Cantonese dishes often met my father's love for stegt flæsk, the national dish of Denmark. Our dining table became a modern day caravanserai. It was the stopping point where cultures could rest, share, and blend. My home is a place rich in both Western and Eastern cultures where I can feel comfort as I embrace both. I am the scribe recording this new exchange! As my parents tell me, I'm living in the garden where diverse flowers bloom together to create a breathtaking landscape of unity. It's here where I learnt to treasure my uniqueness.

This new understanding led me to see Hong Kong with fresh eyes as this thriving metropolis built upon ancient crossroads. As I gazed at this New Silk Road, I was struck by the gleaming infrastructure that surrounds me. Last Saturday, my grandfather drove across the elegant Hong Kong–Zhuhai–Macau Bridge that stretches across the sea, binding the Pearl River Delta into a single economic powerhouse. Each morning, as my mother drove me to school, I marvelled at the colossal container ships with their decks stacked high like floating Lego blocks. Now, however, these containers no longer carry silk, but smartphones and medical supplies that sail to every corner of the world. This morning, I read about the ‘Digital Silk Road’ where data now flows like a virtual river along fibre-optic cables connecting cloud computing hubs from Hong Kong all the way to Helsinki. The means of exchange have transformed from camel caravans to container ships and data streams. That’s just purely amazing! The ancient Silk Road connected bazaars, and the new one connects digital marketplaces and financial hubs. What fascinates me is that the fundamental purpose remains unchanged — connection for the better. Both Silk Roads remind us that we are all part of a shared journey connected by our shared dreams.

I finally understood! The New Tale of the Silk Road is like the story of my parents choosing to build a common language of love. It is the story of data and goods flowing seamlessly across borders, and of scientists on different continents sharing research to heal our sick planet. We all know that life can be a struggle, but we never have to face it alone. The power of togetherness is the key to a better future.

My personal tale is a small one, but isn’t every story significant and unique in its own way? I am two strands of DNA twisted together like the filaments in a fibre-optic cable, carrying a brighter signal and a stronger connection than either could alone. Collaboration creates something neither culture could achieve alone. The New Tale of the Silk Road is my story and it can be yours too. Have you ever dared to learn a new language or embraced a different perspective? In this endless and generous exchange, we can find peace. The world may be tempted to build walls, but can we choose to construct steel and light instead? Can we continue to open up a world of possibilities in peace?

The Silk Road is a journey of connection, exchange, and the beauty of diversity and my family is the modern tale of the New Silk Road. I’m the bridge between Chinese and Danish cultures. I think the greatest thing two continents can build is not a pipeline. It’s me! It’s a child, a family, a new generation carrying both cultures forward.

So, what will your story be?

New Tales of China's Silk Road

St. Paul's Co-educational College Primary School, Cheung Ching Hei – 11

Silk Road—older than empires, but younger than hope, has never once stayed still. The magnificent road — the merging of religions, spices, wealth, and ideas, the highway that for ages has bridged the divide between east and west — once flickered off, but is now evolving back.

Two thousand years ago, she was born in the eyes of a tired explorer who had walked with nothing but stories. He whispered to the emperor, “There are people out there who have never seen silk, nor once touched it, yet they already dream of it.” That whisper became her heartbeat. She stretched herself across deserts, wrapped herself around mountains, and learned to speak every language under the stars, by herself, and shone brightly when no one was looking.

Silk Road was never silent, yet some people never stood to understand. She was one who carried the shimmer of silk across her shoulders like dawn across water, slipped the secret of paper into ancient scrolls, and hid gunpowder in the path between footsteps. To China she brought horses as swift as storms; to Rome she delivered the glow of their world no one had ever imagined. She guided Buddhist monks along tangled paths and golden fields of sunburnt bronze, until their prayers became part of her and integrated into her harmonious symphony of shared aspiration. She spread recipes across continents, and long before anyone knew the word “global,” she taught strangers that the same stars watch over all of us.

For her, the Tang years were the nicest. She dressed in bright colors and danced in the Chang'an markets, and through her embrace, Chang'an became the largest, most radiant city ever, a heroic and bold blend of a million souls who walked her paths: Chinese, Persian, monks and more. She watched them greet each other through affirmations delivered with mutual respect, handshakes instead of open swords, smiles rather than scowls, mutually beneficial exchanges of food and tools and knowledge rather than bloodshed and tyranny. This made her proud of herself, and for the first time, she felt that she could be more than a path, more than a line drawn on a map, but a place to gather and unite, where difference became harmony and peace. She shone like a diamond, brighter than ever.

Then, with the passage of time, the oceans spoke louder, the spray of the pulse of salty waves an irresistible force, alluring travellers to foreign shores. For Silk Road, it was a wreck. Ships were faster, cheaper, and shinier. She grew tired, overwhelmed, exhausted. She couldn't possibly take it anymore, and like a grayscale, becoming darker with no way out, dull and dim, her trails filled with sand, her cities fell asleep, and in a blink of an eye, the world said, “She's gone.”

But little did anyone know, she had only closed her eyes for a nap.

In 2013, Silk Road felt the loving caress of a traveller, and she started slowly to stir, to feel the pulse of life in her veins, and her heart beat with a quickened step. A voice from China said, “Dear friend, we miss you. Come walk again.” She opened her eyes and smiled the biggest smile the world had ever seen.

Bit by bit, with the strength and courage from the traveller, she gathered her pieces, and reconstructed herself once again. Now, she's renamed as the Belt and Road Initiative, envisioned as a majestic array of interconnected paths, and interlaces continents through grand passages of modern structures.

This is her now, revitalised and strong, powerful and bold, wearing steel shoes instead of camel bells, a belt and road upon which she races on rails that make her fly, and she glides like a whisper at 300 km/h. She lights up villages that need hope. In Pakistan she lifts mountains aside, delivering inspiration and turning dreamers into believers, where kids can attend school and realise impossible realities. In Greece she turned a sleepy port into a heartbeat again, and the world realized they needed her.

Silk Road has grown enormously, but she is still the same road who loves transforming strangers into friends. She still carries valuables, now printing presses instead of porcelain, solar panels instead of spices, and dreams bigger than anyone could ever dream. Sometimes people argue about her. Some say she asks for too much, others say she gives too much. Regardless, she just keeps walking, because that's what she does. She knows every road has two directions, and everything can become a bridge if people choose kindness.

Now, she is everywhere at once. She is the light flickering on in a mountain village that waited centuries for her return. She is the road that doesn't know she is riding inside a two-thousand-year-old promise, to light up this world and remind us that no matter what, everyone should be at peace, and differences should never set us apart. Silk Road never went away, but she evolved. She installed elegant highways, radiant ports, and resilient energy networks, in hopes of creating countless jobs and lifting communities into the warm glow of hope, while also sewing everlasting ties of friendship together. Around the world, wise leaders and people dream for a shining future filled with shared wealth, joyful learning from one another's traditions, and a peaceful family of nations, a community with a shared future for mankind, where everyone's dreams can bloom beneath a vast sky of unity and kindness. She is still walking and smiling. Now she's an iconic figure filled with quiet determination, with few to little people knowing her history, and somewhere right now, she is waiting for you to walk with her.



Creative Writing
Non-Fiction

Group 2

The Silk Road

Beanstalk International Bilingual School (BIBS), Victoria Ning – 10

Introduction

The Silk Road is an amazing invention that helped Chinese culture evolve through history. It has a major impact on global trade, and even though time has passed, it still helps connect one great culture to another.

History

The earliest stages of the road wasn't exactly the same as the Silk Road we see nowadays — it formed a small part of it instead. The ancient road started with the Persian Empire creating the Persian Royal Road in the 6th century BCE. The Royal Road stretched a surprisingly long distance of 2700 kilometers, connecting the capital of the country, Susa (modern-day Iran), and a distant, small city, Sardis (somewhere near the Mediterranean Sea next to Turkey). After that, the Chinese emperor of the Western Han Dynasty, Emperor Han Wu Di (汉武帝) officially started the project, following Persia's steps. However, Han Wu Di was aiming to connect not only cities within the country, but also those outside the Chinese borders. This route stretched 4,350 miles (7,000 kilometers) from Chang'an (now known as Xi'an) to other countries like Kazakhstan, passing through important cities in China, for example Shan'xi and Xin'jiang. The Chinese were well-known for breeding silkworms in trees and making a fabric from their silk. Soon, the fabric was named after their material, silk. When silk fabric was introduced to the world, European countries were particularly fascinated by silk — what they called “picking fabric off trees”. Due to the Europeans' love of silk, the Silk Road was constructed all the way to the faraway countries of Europe. In 1877, the trading route became named after the rare fabric that it was used to trade so often by Ferdinand von Richthofen — the route's name became: The Silk Road.

The Golden Age of the Silk Road

The Silk Road's popularity reached its peak in the Tang dynasty, when the mathematicians in India shared their ideas: Arabian astronomers brought useful, smart star-gazing tools; Chinese poets shared their poems, Persian metalsmiths introduced fascinating metalworking strategies — teaching other cultures how to make weapons and gear. Every day, numerous caravans led by horses and camels from different countries would carry tons of spices, dozens of rolls of silk, jewelry embroidered with gold, and much more across to other countries. The Tang Empire welcomed foreign guests and influenced their own culture with them. Soon, countries connected to the Silk Road had similar, or even related cultures. Being part of the Silk Road trade at that time was like being in a huge community of complicated relationships, influencing and learning from each other. The Silk Road didn't only share physical objects like gold and china, it also shared ideas and plans, religion and traditions, and a lot more.

The Silk Road Today

Although some of the main routes of the Silk Road have disappeared in time, part of it still remains as a monument which reminds us of the history of Eastern and Western cultures being connected. Archaeologists have discovered many interesting relics along the pavement of the road, such as the Dunhuang Grottoes, recording Chinese people's wisdom.

Accompanying long-term trades on the Silk Road, many cultures combined due to the existence of this road in terms of cooperation, learning from differences and understanding each other, gradually forming the inclusive society today.

The idea of the Silk Road also inspired China's Belt and Road initiative, a global infrastructure development strategy, which benefits the overall improvement of many developing countries.

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The Silk Road - The Golden Path

Po Leung Kuk Choi Kai Yau School, Lee Hoi Ki Sophia – 10

The Road to Victory

One of the most pivotal roads in the world was known as the Silk Road. This extraordinary road began in China and ended in far eastern Europe. It is well known as what started the import and export trade between Western civilisation and the Eastern.

The Silk Road was created in 130 BCE during the Han Dynasty and abandoned in 1453 CE, over 1500 years later. It got its name, Silk Road, from the valuable silk that China invented. A staggering number of more than 150 countries across Asia and Europe got involved. The road is not just one road; it is a complex web of different paths, both on land and sea. Chang'an, known today as Xi'an, was the birthplace of the start of the Silk Road. The road stretched to different corners of Europe and Asia, such as the Gobi Desert bordering Northern China and Southern Mongolia, the Pamir Mountains in Tajikistan, all the way beyond France. Because the road ran for over 6400 km, it would be tiring and time-consuming for any person to travel. In fact, if one person were to travel the Silk Road on their own, it would take up to three years to complete it one-way. To resolve this problem, they had many checkpoints along the route where vendors would trade with each other and pass the inventory along.

Sharing Is Caring

The Silk Road all started when China realised it had an abundance of unique materials and goods, which they wanted to share with the rest of the world. They knew if they could achieve this, they would put China on the map by increasing its power and bringing wealth to its citizens. The Western civilisation was amazed by what China had to offer and wanted to give many goods back as well, and thus, the long trade started.

Chinese people traded silk, gunpowder, jade, porcelain, and paper. These were all items that the West had not seen before as they were invented in China. They also traded their own blend of spices and tea.

The Western people traded gold, silver, horses, glassware, textiles, wool, linen, and grapes. China already had these goods. However, being such a big country, they needed more inventory. Apart from material things, the West also traded slaves in return for China's precious goods.

The Spread of Knowledge

Monks and missionaries travelled along the Silk Road too. They hoped to share their religion, wisdom, and knowledge across many countries. These missions were successful and are one of the reasons why religions that originated in one country have spread to another, even if that country is far away.

The Silk Road also enabled scholars to have the opportunity to share their knowledge and the languages they knew.

On top of that, warriors of trade exchanged horses and also taught others how to ride them. Artists and workers shared their skills around, which led to the spread of innovative technologies like the exquisite silk-making from China, glassmaking from the West, and advanced printing paper from China. Moreover, knowledge of science, art, literature, crafts, and technologies was shared with different countries in the East and West.

A Bumpy Road

Travelling across the Silk Road was extremely dangerous since there was extreme heat and cold, bleak deserts, high mountains, and robbers robbing unlucky people. It was said that servants at resting inns were working with bandits, and when visitors were sleeping, servants secretly looked inside their luggage and the items they carried, and brought anything valuable and extraordinary to the bandits. To protect travellers, many safe fortified rest stops were established with honest, hard-working servants to let people rest and sleep in peace. Military patrols, watchtowers, and very strict laws and rules were put in place to keep citizens safe (and less stressed).

The End of The Road

Sadly, the Silk Road came to an end due to the rise of the Ottoman Empire from South East Europe and the Mongol Empire from East Asia to the Middle East. They closed down routes and greedily taxed goods heavily. Moreover, a bubonic plague called the Black Death, which broke out in Europe, was also a threat to travellers. Those travellers were not only sharing their inventory but also the plague to other countries as well. Soon, in 1453 CE, the Silk Road had completely disappeared.

Gone But Not Forgotten

The Silk Road was definitely more than just a road. It achieved the purpose of trading goods between countries. It brought the East and West together. On top of that, it shared knowledge, religion, skills, and experience. China achieved its goal of bringing wealth and becoming more powerful—a position it still holds today. Even though the Silk Road has ended, it left behind a more advanced world for us to live in.

The Winding Silk Road

Shanghai Singapore International School, Suran Fan – 10

We all know the sun moves from east to west, but there is also a road as famous as the sun's movement that moves from west to east. The Silk Road. It was a series of famous trade routes, like the veins of an old man's hand, that stretched 6400 kilometers and passed through China, the Middle East and Europe.

The three most famous paths of this well-known historical route are Samarkand, Uzbekistan, which is known for its stunning architecture and as a center of Islamic learning, Athens, the capital of Greece, which linked sea trade routes and led cultural exchange and Tashkent, the capital of Uzbekistan, which was a major trading post on the Silk Road. Thousands of travelers traded their spice, silk and even honey on this vast route.

Imagine if we didn't have the Silk Road. There would be so many foods and other items that would have never reached the west!

Not surprisingly, the Silk Road was created during the great Han Dynasty (206BCE-20CE) when Emperor Wu Di had an ingenious idea to increase the wealth of the country and to encourage foreign trade. Firstly, he sent Zhang Qian, who was a Chinese explorer, to Yuezhi in 139BC, where he became a pioneer of the Silk Road. Later, special envoys were sent to the west, which opened up China even more to exploring trade routes which traversed between the west and Chang'an (which was the old capital of China)

Imagine the noise of the trading, animals, chattering, the dust swirling down the road while traders pitched their caravan tents along the route.

Have you heard of the Columbus of the east? It's Zhang Qian who was a diplomat, traveler and explorer. In 139BC, he led 100 people to the west of China and eventually opened the north south road to the west, named the Silk Road. Zhang Qian also promoted trade with the countries in the west by introducing horses, grapes, dyes and pomegranate to Zhong Yuan.

Imagine the fear and excitement traveling on a new trade route and you don't know where it will lead you because it is so vast.

After many years, after many footprints had made their mark on the Silk Road, it was a political decision which reduced and finally ended the traffic and created a vast echo in the landscape where this busy route had once hosted travellers from all over the world. The Ottoman Empire, boycotted trade with China. This empire was so vast that this simple act ended thousands of years of trade, language, religion, science and philosophy to name a few cultural exchanges. The Ottoman Empire began in 1300 and controlled the Middle East, North Africa, Greece, Hungary and South East of Europe.

Imagine how the road and people changed over 1000 years and the passing of historical events was carried along the Silk Road by travelers from far away seas, words carried away by the dusty, cold wind.

If the Silk Road had a voice, it would be interesting to find out which famous people it would proudly admit had traversed its long and winding road from country to country. In fact, many celebrated people did pass along this notable route. Of course, there were many notable Chinese diplomats and explorers. Xuan Zhang traveled along the silk road to India, then returned to China many years later, where he translated Indian sutras and wrote a book about his journey. Marco Polo also to China along the silk road and stayed for 17 years before returning to Venice. Also Iban Battuta who was a Moroccan explorer born in 1304 and died in 1369. He started traveling as a Muslim on a religious journey and spent his whole life traveling. He came to China and became an envoy to the Emperor in 1342, who spent some time on the Silk Road.

How many renowned travelers have voyaged on the Silk Road? I am sure that the if it were a person, it could tell so many secrets and stories.

Nowadays the once busy Silk Road, with the noises of animals calling and complaining, travellers chattering and bartering and the wind howling or gently sweeping over the path have been replaced. In the present day, whilst we acknowledge the significance of these trade routes, the route is mostly deserted unless tourists are visiting with mobiles to snap photos. Instead, the dust, mud and rocks that made this long-worn road are now hard concrete and smooth tarmac. Signposts for towns that were used as key trade routes are now history museums. People travel quickly by car or transport goods by lorries and trucks instead of the slow and steady donkeys, camels and horses. The silk road now is different from the past but it still holds a valuable place in the history of the eastern and western worlds.

Zhang Qian and the Silk Road

Yaumati Catholic Primary School (Hoi Wang Road), Kwan Kwan Chak – 10

Long time ago, there was an emperor of China named Emperor Wudi. At that time, many regions of China were at war. There was a political union of nomadic tribes called Xiongnu. They were very fierce warriors who wanted to invade China. Consequently, Emperor Wudi had to dispatch a palace attendant to connect the west to fight them. He selected Zhang Qian, a military officer who was familiar with Xiongnu.

Xiongnu wanted to attack China because the Mongolian steppe was a “wasteland” with no iron for tools, no wood for fuel, or no grains for food. Raiding China was the only option to obtain these essential goods. In addition, Xiongnu had severe winters, droughts and locust plagues which could kill up to 70% of their livestock. They could either battle China or face total starvation. It was a life-or-death situation they had to face. Xiongnu frequently attacked to retake the territory that they had lost to Chinese expansion, such as the fertile Ordos region seized by the Qin dynasty. Large-scale invasions were often used to “bully” the Chinese emperors into reopening trade markets or increasing annual tribute payments.

Zhang Qian travelled through Taklamakan Desert and Pamir Plateau. In the desert, Zhang Qian suffered from the heat and he did not have much water. He barely survived with “food” that was actually edible plants. On the plateau, it snowed so Zhang Qian was freezing. When he was going through Hexi Corridor, he got caught by Emperor Wudi of the Han Dynasty with over a hundred men. Then, the emperor commanded him to make an alliance with Yuezhi people to fight against Xiongnu.

On his way to the west, Zhang Qian accidentally opened up a road between China and the west. The road enabled China to exchange goods with the west. The name of the road comes from one type of the goods they traded. It was silk. At that time, silk was very rare and valuable. It came from silkworms. They are actually the larvae of a specific type of moths: the *Bombyx mori* moths.

The production of silk is part of a natural process of giving birth to silkworms. First, a female silkworm lays hundreds of eggs on the leaves of mulberry trees which can be found in a wild range of temperate and subtropical regions across the globe. Once the eggs hatch, silkworms enter a period of rapid growth. After the whole process is done, the humans take the silk and sell it.

When Zhang Qian was returning to China, hoping to avoid Xiongnu who had captured him at the start of his journey, he chose a more southern route through Kunlun Mountains. Despite this, he was seized again by Xiongnu patrols and held in custody for over a year. In 126 BC, a major power struggle broke out within the Xiongnu leadership following the death of their leader (Chanyu). Zhang Qian took advantage of this internal chaos to escape for the final time. At Zhang Qian’s first departure, he returned alone. This time, unlike his first departure, he fled with his Xiongnu wife, whom he had married during his decade of initial captivity, and their son, as well as his loyal servant Ganfu. After 13 total years away, Zhang Qian finally reached the Han capital, Chang’an. Of the original delegation of over 100 men who had set out in 138 BC, only Zhang Qian and Ganfu were fortunate enough to be able to see China again.

Although his original military mission failed—the Yuezhi people refused to ally against Xiongnu—Zhang Qian's return was celebrated because he brought back the first detailed reports of Central Asian civilizations. This information eventually led to the creation of the Silk Road.

Zhang Qian reported on rich, sedentary civilizations like Dayuan (Ferghana) and Daxia that valued Chinese silk and goods. He famously described the superior Ferghana horses, which were larger and stronger than Chinese horses, sparking the Emperor's desire to acquire them for the Han cavalry. He suggested that China could trade its silk for these horses and other products, effectively proposing the foundation of what would become the Silk Road. Besides, Zhang Qian used his geographical knowledge to assist in the Han-Xiongnu War. In 123 BC, he served as a colonel under General Wei Qing. Since he knew where to find water and pasture in the desert, he ensured that the army did not suffer from resource shortages. For his successful guidance, the Emperor honored him with the title Marquis of Bowang. In addition, Zhang Qian was credited with bringing several foreign plants to China, including grapes, alfalfa, walnuts, pomegranates and garlic.

After his return, Zhang Qian was sent on another major mission to seek an alliance with the Wusun people to further weaken Xiongnu in 119–115 BC. In his final years, he was promoted to Grand Messenger, making him one of the nine highest ministers in the government. He died in around 114 BC as a national hero celebrated for “opening the window” between China and the West.

Silk was not only priceless goods in the past, now it is still one of the most expensive materials for tailoring clothes. For that, let us all hope that all these historical contexts will last forever.

Non-Fiction

Group 3



The New Tales of China's Silk Road

Immaculate Heart of Mary College, Chu Chi Man – 13

In today's world, only a few segments of the Silk Road remain in use, such as the paved highway linking Pakistan and Xinjiang in China. Nevertheless, this ancient route continues to symbolize enduring connections between China and various Western nations, significantly influencing art and literature. The goods exchanged along these paths clearly showcased the remarkable creativity of the Chinese people. For instance, exquisite Buddhist art flourished alongside the emergence of fine porcelain, which stands as a testament to exceptional craftsmanship. Furthermore, silk served as a luxurious material for royalty, allowing them to craft clothing that was significantly lighter and more comfortable than other fabrics. This indulgence enabled the elite of ancient China to experience true opulence. In exchange, silk was traded for other precious goods in Western countries, including aromatic spices and tea.

The ancient Chinese possessed a profound artistic spirit that enabled them to create extraordinary works of art, with silk emerging as one of the major commodities transported along the Silk Road. This extensive network was actively utilized for over 1,500 years, stretching from around 130 BCE to 1453 CE. Throughout this significant period, the Silk Road played an essential role in fostering China's economic prosperity, cultural enrichment, and political advancement.

Moreover, numerous technological advancements were exchanged along the Silk Road. For example, techniques in papermaking and sophisticated textile production spread widely. The technology of papermaking, which originated in China, gradually disseminated to Islamic civilization and eventually reached Europe. Merchants traveling along the Silk Road carried paper with them to meticulously record their trade transactions, contracts, and personal letters. Additionally, they shared intricate papermaking techniques across various regions, contributing immensely to the broader dissemination of knowledge. Merchants and travelers exchanged news, stories, and valuable insights through verbal communication, which helped forge strong relationships and build mutual trust among participants. Along the Silk Road, where travelers frequently encountered groups speaking entirely different languages, they relied on nonverbal communication to interact effectively. They appeared to develop improvised systems or signals that facilitated mutual understanding despite linguistic barriers. Through these diverse modes of communication, various cultures intertwined, seemingly influencing the evolution of languages in both ancient times and the modern world. This historical legacy underscores the impressive communication skills that people cultivated across great distances.

Additionally, silk evolved into a powerful medium for connecting the East and the West, helping to maintain long-term relationships among diverse cultures. During the Han dynasty, artisans frequently produced porcelain items specifically for exchange with regions such as the Arabian Peninsula and the Indian subcontinent. This porcelain gradually became a prestigious status symbol among Arabian societies, leading people to actively seek it out. Later, a distinctive new style of blue-and-white porcelain appeared, emerging after the earlier tradition of celadon ware. Through sustained cultural exchange and economic interactions, porcelain exerted a significant influence on other countries. It remained one of the primary commodities in East-West trade.

Moreover, the Silk Road enabled different countries to discover and introduce new crops, such as rice and citrus fruits, which were exchanged between China, Central Asia, and other areas. Various cooking methods and recipes were also shared along these routes. Spices like pepper traveled extensively via the Silk Road, transforming culinary practices from East to West and earning certain sections of the network the alternative name “spice route.” These spices constituted highly valuable goods; they dramatically enhanced the flavor of food and increased its overall appeal and worth. This exchange drove improvements in food production, along with advancements in agricultural knowledge and practices across different regions. In the field of art, artists absorbed new techniques, styles, and diverse elements from one another through regional interactions, encompassing painting, textiles, statues, and pottery. These artistic influences spread along the Silk Road, frequently channeled through Central Asia.

Along the route, Buddhist monks constructed remarkable combinations of caves and temples, which were often located near major stopping points of the Silk Road, such as the famous Buddhas of Bamiyan. Although these monumental statues were tragically destroyed by the Taliban in March 2001 over the course of about 25 days through deliberate demolition efforts, they once stood as extraordinary symbols of the route’s cultural importance. Many people assume that the Silk Road primarily served to export Chinese silk to Western countries, but in reality, a wide array of goods originated from Rome, India, the Arab Caliphate, and later Russia, flowing in both directions.

Travelers from other countries traded expensive goods from their homelands with one another, which helped develop sophisticated trading systems that extended across the entire world. The Silk Road contributed to regional development by fostering economic growth, generating greater wealth, and promoting the rise of prosperous city-states through enhanced commerce. For example, the introduction of horses to China strengthened military capabilities and later contributed to the formidable power of the Mongol Empire, whose leaders recognized the practical value of horses as essential transport after observing their widespread use in China. Furthermore, the Silk Road established a vast network that connected people globally from East to West. Knowledge in various fields, such as scientific advancements, astronomy, mathematics, and medicine, spread along these paths. Buddhism traveled from India to China, profoundly influencing Chinese art and literature. Overall, the Silk Road played a major role in disseminating religious knowledge. It significantly impacted the spread of religious ideas by facilitating extensive interaction among diverse cultures. The Silk Road shaped the development of civilizations across continents. The movements of people led to substantial cultural blending, with traditions shared widely. For instance, spices now commonly used in Chinese cuisine originally came from India, and many countries celebrate Christmas today with their own unique local customs. These distinctive Christmas traditions reflect individual cultural heritages and exemplify cultural blending. Such exchanges resulted in shared technologies and artistic influences.

The first individuals to undertake the arduous journey along what would later become known as the Silk Road were led by Zhang Qian, an envoy serving during the Western Han dynasty. He was dispatched on a critical diplomatic mission to form an alliance with the Yuezhi people, aiming to unite their forces against the powerful Xiongnu nomads who posed a major threat to Han China. However, the Yuezhi, having relocated far to the west after previous defeats, ultimately refused to join forces with the Han in opposing the Xiongnu.

The first mission lasted around 13 years, during which he faced constant threats from the Xiongnu. When he finally returned to Chang'an, although he could not form the desired alliance with the Yuezhi, he brought back valuable information that expanded Chinese understanding of the distant lands and cultures to the west. Seven years later, he was sent to travel through Central Asia, where he learned about the cultures, lands, and products of various western civilizations. He discovered new crops previously unknown in China, such as grapes and alfalfa. The exploration of the Silk Road spanned approximately 20 years through his efforts and subsequent developments. He effectively traversed the Silk Road on his journeys and explored several key trade routes.

The Silk Road was gradually expanded through these pioneering missions that bridged the East and the West. Once reliable trade routes came into existence, numerous merchants began actively exchanging goods with other regions, including fine textiles, spices, and tea from China, while in return the West received fruits like peaches and citrus varieties. Along these perilous routes, merchants frequently risked having their valuable cargoes stolen by robbers, as many traded items were highly expensive and desirable. China became increasingly wealthy and earned great recognition in other countries because of its exceptional innovations in textile production and its development of wonderful culinary traditions and foodstuffs. Additionally, famous explorers traversed the Silk Road, such as Marco Polo, who spent 24 years journeying along the trade routes to reach China. He wrote a detailed book recounting the tale of his travels. This work inspired other explorers, like Christopher Columbus, to continue pursuing exploration inspired by the Silk Road. The Silk Road enabled many regions to learn about technologies, creativity, and innovations among people in Europe as well as Asia. It encouraged them to explore new knowledge, promoting development in various aspects and facilitating the blending of different cultures. For example, Chinese people now listen to songs created in foreign countries and enjoy Italian cuisine in China. Different countries possess their own unique beauty, and we need to respect other cultures despite our own habits and traditional events. It essentially laid the foundation for modern globalization, even for ancient peoples.

People in ancient times established an extraordinary trade route that allowed for the discovery and appreciation of diverse cultures. This route facilitated the development of our global trading systems and enriched our collective knowledge. By examining the journeys of the Silk Road explorers, we learn valuable lessons about the importance of mutual respect among nations. Ancient peoples invented and shared countless innovations, and through their experiences, we gain a deeper understanding of collaborative progress. With remarkable intelligence, they traversed the Silk Road and exchanged goods that continue to enhance our lives in various areas, including food, medicine, and art. We can draw inspiration from their achievements to ignite our own creativity and emulate the persistent spirit of Zhang Qian as we face modern challenges.

This ancient trade route serves not only as a conduit for silk and other goods but also as a powerful symbol of our profound connections and the beautiful blending of cultures across countries. This cultural fusion highlights the elegance of collaboration among different nations. Today, we should appreciate the rich diversity of cultures that enrich our world. By learning from the past, we can become innovators ourselves, inventing useful solutions for future generations. The Silk Road thus continues to guide us toward a more unified and understanding future, reminding us of the value of cultural exchange and cooperation.

A 21st Century Version of China's Grand Strategy Rendered Tangible

Maryknoll Convent School (Secondary Section), Wan Hei Yi Hayze – 13

The very term “Silk Road” is a poetic idea, a soft call from history that brings to mind the imagined sound of camel bells and the beautiful sight of colorful silks being shown in busy markets from China to Samarkand to Venice. It tells the story of a time when connection was valuable and life-changing, a slow conversation between different cultures that changed what people ate, believed, and invented around the world. But as technology has improved, this so-called “Silk Road” is not what it used to be.

Yet, that ancient echo has not faded. Instead, it has been transformed and reborn through one of today's biggest and most ambitious plans for global politics and the economy: China's Belt and Road Initiative. This is the stage where the “Modern version of the China Silk Road” is being written. These are not just sequels, but reinventions, chronicling a journey from tangible goods to integrated systems, from simple trade between merchants to a dream of a shared future, all while dealing with the profound complexities of the modern world.

The most visceral of these new tales are told in the language of steel and concrete. Where caravans once inched along the Taklamakan Desert, a network of high-speed railways now threads through mountains and across plains. The journey from Chengdu to Poland, once a fantasy, is now a logistics reality, with “block trains” carrying electronics in under two weeks, a fraction of the sea voyage time. This is the Silk Road of Rails, a network of efficiency that defines continental trade rhythms in another way.

On the other hand, the Silk Road of the Sea is experiencing a renaissance. From the automated cranes of Greece—a port recreated by Chinese investment—to the development of Pakistan and Sri Lanka, a new sea voyage map is being drawn.

On land, the narrative expands to power grids and pipelines—the Silicone and Hydrocarbon Roads—channeling energy and resources across borders, powering industries and homes thousands of miles from their source. These physical manifestations form the bold strokes in the new Silk Road painting.

However, to focus solely on the present is to miss the most revolutionary plot twist. The 21st-century tale is that of the Digital Silk Road. If silk was the luxury commodity of the ancient world, data is the indispensable currency of ours. From laying undersea fiber-optic cables across the Pacific and Indian Oceans to deploying 5G networks in Southeast Asia and Africa, China is actively shaping the digital system of emerging economies. Coupled with the export of e-commerce platforms and systems like Alipay, the Digital Silk Road aims to create a seamless, technologically interoperable sphere. This digital tapestry, while offering potential for innovation and inclusion, also weaves complex new threads of technological dependency into the revolutionary fabric.

Beyond the flow of goods and bytes, the most enduring tales are those of people and planet—the human and ecological narratives. The ancient Silk Road was a vector for Buddhism, astronomy, and papermaking. Its modern counterpart fosters a Silk Road of Minds through sprawling scholarship programs. Tens of thousands of students from

different countries now study in Chinese universities, forming a generation with personal and professional ties to China. Similarly, tourism flourishes along heritage sites linked by the old routes, while artistic exchanges attempt to build a softer, more relatable narrative of mutual appreciation.

Yet, no grand narrative has no conflicts. The New Tales are also scrutinized for writing stories of debt and dependency. The case of Sri Lanka's Hambantota Port, leased to a Chinese company for 99 years after debt struggles, looms large as a cautionary tale for other nations.

In conclusion, the modern story of China's Silk Road constitutes a sprawling, multi-volume epic still in progress. It is a story of breathtaking infrastructure, invisible data streams and academic exchanges. It has moved far beyond the simplicity of camel caravans and colourful soft silk to grapple with the hard realities of global finance and digital sovereignty.

Whether this modern saga will be remembered as a tale of mere ambition or one of genuinely sustainable prosperity is a question that history and the future will judge and determine. For now, the New Silk Road stands as the defining geo-economic project of our era, actively weaving a complex new tapestry of global interconnection for the 21st century. It also stands as a renewed, redeveloped and better version of the old Silk Road that will always represent the start of massive cultural exchange in China. Its final chapters will be written not by one nation, but by the collective cooperation and resilience of all the peoples along its path.

The Silk Road's Legacy

Wycombe Abbey School, Justin Ho – 13

The first thing that strikes me isn't the scent of spice or silk above a market stall. It's the sound—a braid of hooves, laughter, coins, and voices in unfamiliar languages. Somewhere, a camel complains. Metal taps metal. The Silk Road marketplace, I imagine, is noisy, layered, and alive—a place where the world gathers and parts again, over and over.

History usually comes in neat chapters: dates, names, empires. But the Silk Road sprawls and slips away the moment you try to pin it down. That's why it fascinates me—because this isn't just a story in a book. It's a living, shifting network that you can almost step into, if you listen closely enough.

The Silk Road wasn't a single road, but a tangled web spanning thousands of miles and more than a thousand years. Caravans carried not just silk, but people, ideas, and ambitions. The very name “Silk Road” is misleading—there were dozens of shifting paths, some over deserts, some across mountains, and many branching far beyond China and Rome. Goods like tea, porcelain, horses, and gold changed hands countless times, each exchange colored by new languages and customs. More influential than luxury were things like paper, which made knowledge portable, and gunpowder, which changed the world's balance of power. The Silk Routes didn't just connect places—they rewrote what was possible between them.

Picture Samarkand: you might hear five languages in a day, taste spices from India, and see patterns on cloth you've never imagined. These cities—Samarkand, Kashgar, Bukhara—became legendary because they were crossroads where strangers became neighbors. Most people didn't go the whole way: goods moved in stages, passing from hand to hand, city to city. Sometimes a wrong turn or sudden storm could end a journey. Danger was constant, but so was the possibility of surprise.

Buddhist monks carried not just scriptures but new art and ways of thinking to China. In Central Asia, Buddhist stupas and Zoroastrian fire temples stood near Christian churches. The Silk Road blurred “East” and “West.” Cultures borrowed and lent, often without realizing it. Even music, recipes, and slang traveled as easily as silk.

But at its heart, the Silk Road is a story about people—about choices and chances, mistakes and luck. Caravan leaders, merchants, translators, and artisans shaped the routes with every risk and every bargain. Their decisions, large and small, are what made the Silk Road more than a line on a map.

The Silk Road was about adaptation. Routes shifted with empires and disease. The Black Death devastated populations. The Mongol era's Pax Mongolica allowed trade to flourish, but peace was always fragile.

Routes shifted with politics, wars, and risk. Han dynasty envoys like Zhang Qian traveled into the unknown, sometimes vanishing for years, carrying not just silk but the hopes and questions of entire empires.

Empires like the Parthians bridged east and west. By the first century CE, Chinese silk was coveted from Rome to Egypt.

The Silk Road's legacy isn't just found in old ruins and museum cases. Even after sea trade took over, the idea of interconnectedness remained. Today, you'll find blue-and-white porcelain in Istanbul's markets and Uyghur noodles in Shanghai Street stalls. Borders are porous, and identity is layered—sometimes without us even realizing it.

Goods like tea, porcelain, horses, and gold crossed continents, carrying stories and journeys in their seams.

And some of the most important cargo wasn't shiny or luxurious at all.

Paper changed the world: it made knowledge easier to store, copy, and spread. Ideas could outlive the people who spoke them.

Gunpowder also spread, reshaping warfare and society. The Silk Routes weren't just trade routes—they made history.

Of course, none of this happened on a smooth, safe, well-lit highway.

Travel along the Silk Routes was dangerous—bandits, deserts, and mountains threatened travelers. One wrong turn could mean disaster. The weather could change everything.

People traveled these routes despite the risks. Most didn't go the whole way; goods moved in stages, passed between local traders in key cities.

Imagine growing up in a crossroads city: hearing many languages, eating food from distant lands, seeing fabrics and jewelry from places you've only heard about. Some days the world would feel impossibly big; other days strangely small—closer than you'd ever expect.

And then there's an exchange that can't be weighed on a scale: beliefs and knowledge.

So much of the Silk Road's story is lost—fleeting conversations, shared meals, trust and betrayal, jokes and arguments. For every Marco Polo, there were thousands of unnamed traders, guides, cooks, and families who shaped history in quieter ways. Their stories disappeared, but their choices still echo in what we eat, wear, and believe.

If you imagine the Silk Road as a straight hallway, you're missing the whole building. It was a network, a marketplace, a classroom, and sometimes a battlefield.

But there's also a shadow side to connection, and the Silk Routes carried that too.

Diseases traveled the same networks. Plague likely spread this way, a brutal reminder that "globalization" isn't new. Networks that delivered silk and ideas could also deliver tragedy.

The Silk Routes existed through periods of huge change. Empires rose and fell. Sometimes, as during the Mongol era, long-distance travel became easier, but it was never one smooth highway—more patchwork than a single road.

That's why it's funny that Marco Polo is seen as the Silk Road's mascot. He traveled at a rare moment, but most trade happened through small trips and deals.

So why does all of this matter now, in my life?

Because the Silk Routes aren't just history. They're a mirror.

The Silk Road proves the world has always been connected in messy ways—with profit and danger, curiosity and loss. Beauty and risk were companions.

And, on a more personal level, the Silk Routes make me think about what it means to chase something bigger than your comfort zone.

It's easy to say, "I want more from life." It's harder to act like it.

I imagine myself in one of those caravan cities—not as a hero, but as a regular person. I'd be overwhelmed, distracted by smells I can't name and music I can't follow. I'd probably buy cloth or spices for the thrill of carrying a piece of someone else's world home, even if I never learned how to use them.

And then, eventually, the wonder would turn into questions.

Who made this? How far did it travel? Did they feel proud, or was the world changing too fast?

That's what feels most human: the small lives inside the big system. History isn't just emperors and wars. It's merchants who slept lightly, monks who carried texts across deserts, translators who made deals possible, and innkeepers who listened to a hundred stories but never left home. The world moved, but so did its people—each with their own hopes and fears.

If connection was the Silk Routes' greatest strength, then those people were its heartbeat. And connection is still our greatest strength—if we handle it with care.

Now, ideas travel faster than any caravan. We've built our own Silk Routes—digital, instant, nonstop. We share music, memes, recipes, and news in seconds. But the network gives and takes: misinformation and fear travel the same pathways. The pattern holds, just faster.

Learning about the Silk Routes doesn't make me want to romanticize the past. It makes me want to respect how complicated it was, and to be more thoughtful about the connections I'm part of now.

Because maybe the real legacy of the Silk Routes isn't silk at all.

Maybe the real legacy is that the world has always been a conversation—sometimes generous, sometimes violent, always ongoing. The future belongs to those who listen across distances.

When I think about my own dreams—about writing, about being heard, about creating something that lasts longer than a moment—I think about those routes again. I think about how they existed because people kept choosing movement over isolation, exchange over fear, curiosity over certainty. Not perfectly, not peacefully all the time, but persistently.

And that's what I want this essay to do, in its own small way: to be a kind of crossing point.

The Silk Road is a lesson in risk and wonder. Progress means stepping into the unknown, trusting what you carry—silk, ideas, or hope—matters, even if you never see where it ends up. The Silk Road was never just fair, but always alive with possibility. If there's one image I leave you with, it's the sound of the marketplace: the braided rope of voices, footsteps, and coins—reminding us history was never silent, and the world was never truly apart. The Silk Routes weren't one road; they were a living network. A place where someone pauses. Reads. Imagines. Learns. Feels. Maybe even goes looking for more. For those who dare, connection is the way to change—and maybe, to change the world.



Creative Writing
Non-Fiction

Group 3

From Chang'an to the Mediterranean: Journeys Along the Silk Road that Connected Worlds

HKMA David Li Kwok Po College, Kush Jignesh Parmar – 14

Introduction and Historical Background

The Silk Road was one of the most significant trade networks in history, connecting the East and West and facilitating not only commerce but also rich cultural exchanges between various civilizations. This vast ancient network of routes, which comprised both land and maritime paths, was established during the Han Dynasty in China around the 2nd century BCE, and spanned across regions including Central Asia, the Middle East, and several parts of Europe.

The name “Silk Road” derives from the silk trade that significantly enhanced commerce between various regions, however, the routes facilitated much more than the exchange of silk. These vast networks of trade routes were not only famous for trading silk and other valuable commodities, but also exchanging philosophical ideas, spices, art, and precious metals among diverse cultures which contributed to the spread of religions, and led to significant technological innovations, fostering profound cultural and economic exchanges between civilizations like the Roman, Persian, and Chinese empires. Despite its decline in the mid-1400s, the Silk Road’s legacy continues to shape global trade and cultural interactions today of the regions that it once connected.

Trade and Commerce

The Silk Road facilitated the exchange of a diverse range of goods and commodities, which were highly valuable at that time. Among the most famous was silk, a luxurious fabric of ancient Chinese origin, woven from the protein fibre produced by the silkworm as it makes its cocoon. Silk was regarded as an extremely valuable product and was reserved for the exclusive usage of the Chinese imperial court for the production of clothes, banners, and other items of prestige. Its production technique was a fiercely guarded secret within China for some 3,000 years until it spread to other regions such as India and Japan, and eventually to the west in the 6th century CE. Later on, silk became a symbol of wealth and status in many civilizations. For instance, during the 1st century BCE, silk was introduced to the Roman Empire, where it was considered an exotic luxury that became extremely popular, and detailed Byzantine regulations for the manufacturing of silk clothes were discovered later on, reflecting its importance as a royal fabric and an important source of revenue. In fact, despite the Roman attempts to ban silk due to the trade imbalances it caused and the fact that it was inadequately modest, silk was still traded and wasn’t successfully banned, which reflects how wealth shaped governance in the past as well as the high demand for this fabric in regions beyond China. Therefore, this lavish item was one of the early drivers for the development of trading routes from Europe to the Far East.

However, even though the name “Silk Road” derives from the popularity of Chinese silk among tradesmen in the Roman Empire and elsewhere in Europe, the material was indeed not the only important export from the East to the West. Other items and valuables were also

traded along the Silk Road economic belt which included fruits and vegetables, livestock, grains, artwork, precious metals and stones. Moreover, commodities such as gunpowder and paper, were also among the most-traded items and were spread to different regions via the Silk Road, with paper first arriving in Samarkand in A.D. 700 and then further spreading to Europe. The arrival of paper and other items through the Silk Road enhanced the overall economic development as Europe saw the rise of the mass production of books and newspapers which led to the eventual development of Gutenberg's printing press. This wider exchange of ideas and thoughts brought about by trade and commerce made it evident that the Silk Road had lasting impacts on the culture and history of the West.

The geographical layout of the Silk Road also played a crucial role in shaping trade and commerce. It consisted of both overland routes and maritime paths, connecting China with the Mediterranean, India, and the Arabian Peninsula. Cities like Samarkand, Bukhara, and Kashgar were vital hubs where goods were exchanged, and various types of merchants who traded in different means met. These routes not only facilitated trade but also enabled cultural exchanges, as diverse groups mingled and shared their experiences and beliefs in these bustling centres. As cities became trade hubs, they experienced growth and prosperity, leading to improved infrastructure and urbanization. Empires such as the Roman Empire and the Tang Dynasty leveraged the wealth accumulated from Silk Road commerce to expand their influence and control.

Cultural Exchange and Religious and Philosophical Influence

The Silk Road was much more than a means of trade; it acted as a bridge for cultural and religious interactions. For over two thousand years, this web of trade routes didn't just transport silk and spices; it led to the profound exchange of religious beliefs, philosophical thought, and art, all of which collectively reshaped civilizations from all over the world.

The Silk Road also played a crucial role in the diffusion of religious beliefs. Major religions, such as Buddhism, Zoroastrianism, and later Islam, spread along these trade routes, leading to many cultural transformations. This exchange not only influenced religious practices but also shaped societal values and norms. The spread of different forms of Buddhism from India to China and the introduction of various forms of art and philosophy underscore the route's importance in fostering interconnectedness among diverse cultures, as religions didn't simply replace each other but often blended. For instance, merchants built shrines to practice their faith abroad, and scholars, monks, and traders of different faiths lived side-by-side in oasis cities such as Samarkand and Palmyra.

These people introduced their culture and religion to locals while also sharing their world view such as their morals and beliefs. This shows us that cultural exchange along the Silk Road created a legacy of religious diversity in which connections across vast distances have historically led not to religious uniformity, but to rich and new religions and practices, where ideas are shared, translated, and transformed across regions and civilizations from all across the globe.

In addition, the Silk Road facilitated significant cultural and artistic interchange, allowing different civilizations to share artistic traditions, styles, and techniques. For instance, the blending of Chinese artistic methods with Persian and Greco-Roman styles led to unique art forms, resulting in advancements in fields such as painting, sculpture, and textile design. The interactions along the Silk Road also resulted in the exchange of languages and literary practices as merchants, travellers, and scholars influenced the development of various languages, leading to the creation of new dialects and the incorporation of foreign words.

Modern-Day Implications

Despite the long-lasting status of the Silk Road, it eventually declined due to several factors, including the emergence of maritime trade routes in the Age of Discovery, which offered safer and faster means of transporting goods and made the overland routes obsolete and less viable for trade. Additionally, political instability and the rise of new empires and nation-states blocked the routes which were originally the trading paths that facilitated commerce along the Silk Road. Due to these factors, there was a significant reduction in the use of the Silk Road for trading and it eventually declined in the mid-1400s.

However, the Silk Road was revived in 2013 as China launched the Belt and Road Initiative which is a modern project that aims to enhance global trade and infrastructure development. This endeavour focuses on building a network of land and sea trade routes across Asia, Europe, and Africa by investing in ports and roads, aiming to improve connectivity and foster economic cooperation among the 150 participating countries. In fact, the world we live in today, can be seen as a new iteration of the Silk Road, as vast trade networks and the exchange of goods, services, and ideas exist in today's modern economy as well. The rapid development of technology and communication has also enhanced international trade, allowing countries to connect in ways similar to those of the ancient Silk Road. Just imagine, what would our world be like today if the Silk Road never existed? In this case, our world today might lack the rich cultural diversity while the absence of this vital trade network would have hindered the sharing of ideas, technologies, and religious beliefs among diverse cultures. This project reflects the ongoing relevance of the Silk Road, as this project seeks to strengthen economic ties and cultural exchanges similar to those that flourished centuries ago.

Ultimately, the Silk Road serves as a reminder of the importance of connection and collaboration in a world that continues to grow and change. By embracing these values today, we can foster a more harmonious global community that honours the rich heritage of our shared past while paving the way for a brighter, interconnected future.

imagination. As we continue to explore the depths of paleontological knowledge, the lessons learned from these ancient beings will undoubtedly shape our understanding of both the past and the future.

The Silk Road

The HKCCCU Logos Academy, Liu Ming Wa – 12

The Silk Road was an international trading network of multiple routes during the ancient times when transportation was only possible through horses, ships, and walking. It is one of the oldest and most famous trading routes, ranging from the ancient capital of China (Chang'an) all the way to Europe, connecting Central East, South, Southeast, and West Asia along with East Africa with Southern Europe. Through it, we discovered a new way of connecting the world through goods and information. Helping us understand what was happening beyond the world and made us overcome the fear of the unknown. The Silk Road isn't just a trading network; it was a strand of thread that single-handedly helped us understand more and more about the globe we live on today.

The name of the Silk Road comes from the popular product of silk that was manufactured in China. The name "Silk Road" was made in the late 19th century, but some 20th- and 21st-century historians instead prefer the term Silk Routes.

The network first started during the Han Dynasty, when a Chinese envoy called Zhang Qian travelled to the West as a military diplomat to set up an alliance with some nomadic groups. Unintentionally, his traverse made a different establishment than what he originally intended, the Silk Road. China traded cotton, wool, linen goods, jade, silver, iron, gemstones, silk, porcelain, paper, gunpowder, tea, spices, and horses while they got in return by the Mediterranean wine, olive oil, glassware, linen, incense, spices, and weapons. The Silk Road also would trade slaves, along with local culture, religion, and scientific knowledge.

After this, many countries played a significant role in connecting the Road closer to the outside world. The Parthian Empire made connections to the Mediterranean, the rise of the Roman Empire made the Western terminus of the system. By the 1st century, the Silk Road was so successful that it made the Chinese be able to give silk to places like Rome, Egypt, and Greece. In return, the West gave China horses, honey, camels, wine, and even gold. Even the religion Buddhism was not in China until the Indian people spread the word through the Silk Road, which inspired future stories and films like *Journey to the West* or *Dragon Ball Z!*

Along that, the expansion of arts also increased because of the Silk Road. Hellenistic, Iranian, Indian, and Chinese arts were scattered around the world. Further increasing the cultures of the West and East alike.

However, the Silk Road wasn't always this big and popular. Over centuries, the Silk Road expanded in different routes until in the 14th century. Back then, when groups like the first agricultural civilizations and the nomadic tribes met each other, things did not go as planned and they fought with each other. For example, the Scythians had met tribes from other countries like China, Greece, India, and Egypt first fought with each other during their first encounter, but eventually they stopped fighting, came to their senses and started trading with one another. One of the reasons the Silk Road expanded to the West was because of one man called Darius the First, who completed the Persian Royal Road in the 5th century BCE, which stretched from the Tigris River to the Aegean Sea. It expanded even more when the famous conqueror Alexander the Great invaded Persia and expanded his empire further East towards India, China realized this when Chinese envoy Zhang Qian travelled and reported he saw sophisticated tribes that had a lot of stuff that China hasn't seen before in the history of China at that time.

In fact, the reason why the Silk Road has been kept intact for centuries is because of the demand for foreign and exotic materials from the East and West alike. For example, silk in the Roman Empire back in the days were so popular and demanding that the Government had to forcefully ban its trade to prevent further economic damages. Meanwhile, Roman glassware was highly prized to the Chinese since they loved it a lot. Even when Chinese dynasties fell and Western empires disintegrated, the Silk Road was still able to keep intact and resume its building day after day, week after week. The Silk Road is so important that it even makes Mongolian hordes, which are known for pillaging, does not dare to disrupt the trading, rather to protect it instead. Unfortunately, the Silk Road let it to its own demise, when marine ships were being much more advanced thanks to the first compass, helping people reach places through sea travel instead of land travel.

Because of this invention, sea travel was the much faster and better choice to travel and discover to unknown places never seen before. Like when Christopher Columbus discovered a big empty island, he named it America, or when Europeans went to expand Africa. Historians call this event the “Age of Exploration”, and none of this would not happen if it weren’t for the Silk Road.

During the Three Kingdoms Era, trading through the Gansu corridor started to decline as the Roman Empire started to have more barbarian attacks throughout the empire. But it was shortly revived during the Tang Dynasty. During that period Xing Jiang was under control of Turkic tribes, so the Tang Dynasty conquered that piece of territory and reopened the Silk Road, followed by the sudden burst of trading activities between the West and the East. After the fall of the Tang, new Dynasty Song still had no control over the Gansu corridor, but in fact was blocked by the Western Xia Empire. They tried to take the land back, but they failed. Two centuries later, most Song people was forced to fled to the South, making them even further from the Silk Road. The empire fell when the Mongols took over China in the 12th century, but the Mongols kept the Silk Road intact. By the Yuan Dynasty, the Silk Road had reached at its peak. Mostly because it was able to give explorers an opportunity to learn about more cultures and geography of the far east. One of the famous explorations was conducted by traveler Marco Polo, who came to the East from Venice, Italy. He worked as a tax collector for 24 years in China before moving back to Italy due to the decline of Mongol Empire, later he wrote all about the adventures on his journey through a book called “The travels of Marco Polo”.

Genghis Khan, the man who conquered all the Old World back then, kept the Silk Road intact even though he wiped out cities and burned villages down to the ground. In fact, because Genghis reunited everyone, it was much more easier to access the Silk Road Network as China along with the West lived in a puppeteer state of Mongolia. Trade probably would have flourished even more than before due to the fact that a literal war just happened and every country needed more resources.

Silk Road also helped make empires like the Ottoman Empire, Mongol Empire, and Safavid Empire thanks to one of China’s 4 greatest inventions: gunpowder. Trading gunpowder to the West helped lay the foundation of modern weapons like guns, tank, air strikes, or even missiles! China also traded the rest of their greatest inventions, leading to much more sophisticated ways of exploration and writing development. Modern technologies like printing and book, or advanced weapons and tracking radars, are all just the final stage of China’s 4 greatest inventions. Without these innovations, life would be pretty tough for us humans.

Nowadays, the Silk Road has already been dismantled and is not being used as much as the ancient days, but its impact on the world today is humongous! The Silk Road has improved the movement of languages, traditions, ideologies, and innovations. Even though the Silk Road is gone, the trading route is now replaced by China's "One Belt One Road" initiative. Founded by Chinese government official "Xi Jinping", the project composed of six urban development land corridors linked by road, rail, energy, and digital infrastructure and the Maritime Silk Road linked by the development of ports. The target completion for the "One Belt One Road" initiative will be in the year 2049. The "One Belt One Road" initial focus has been infrastructure investment, education, construction materials, railway and highway, automobile, real estate, power grid, and iron and steel.

Xi first announced the BRI concept as the "Silk Road Economic Belt" on 7 September 2013 at Nazarbayev University in Astana, Kazakhstan. In October 2013 during a speech delivered in Indonesia, Xi said that China planned to build a "twenty-first century Maritime Silk Road" to enhance cooperation in Southeast Asia and beyond.

Today, we have a lot of high-tech advanced technologies like planes and cross-cable communication cables to help us share anything around the world. From an American buying a t-shirt in China, to watching Russian shows in New Zealand. None of this would have been possible if we hadn't had the pioneering cultures whose efforts made one of the first trading networks: the Silk Road.



Creative Writing
Non-Fiction

Group 4

The Impact of the Natural Environment on the Silk Road

HD Beijing School, Sun Jia Ming Arjuna – 15

In 138 BCE, when Zhang Qian left Changan with rolls of silk and headed toward the huge deserts in the western regions, he didn't choose his path randomly. When merchants from the Song Dynasty loaded porcelains and spices on to ships in Quanzhou's harbor, waiting for the sea wind to fill their sails, they weren't following a random schedule. The Silk Road, whether the dusty land paths that twisted through mountains and oases, or the blue sea routes that spreads across the Indian and Pacific Oceans, was never a fixed, rigid road. Instead, it was a living, changing route, shaped by a hidden force: the environment. This "invisible planner" decided where the Silk Road could go, how fast it could go, and which cities would grow into prosperous trade centres. The desert's harsh sands blocking straight paths, sticking the feet of camels on the line of horizon. Low passes in mountains becoming the only usable paths, limiting travel to certain seasons. Ocean monsoons blocking in the way towards wealth, turning the trade into a one way's journey. Even the important stops, from the busy oasis city of India to the lively port of Quan zhou, was linked to the changes of rivers, coastlines, or climate.

To understand the Silk Road, you need to know that humans didn't "build" this ancient network—they worked with nature, adapting to its limits. Using its gifts and creating a way that matches the Earth's geography, they discovered a way to collaborate with nature. In the following text, we will look about how humans learned to follow its rules, and how this cooperation between humans and nature made one of the history's greatest trading channel between civilizations.

The Land Silk Road, which ran through vast mountains and deserts, was deeply shaped by the nature. The most important natural help for travelers and merchants were the oases—small areas with water and grass in dry deserts. For example, the Hexi Corridor (a long, narrow path in northern China) has many oases, like Dunhuang. Caravans couldn't go through the large deserts directly; there are no water and food. So, they had to follow the line of oases. These oases became popular rest stops, travelers filled their water bag, fed camel, and even stayed overnight there. Without these oases, the land Silk Road would have been impossible.

Then there were the mountain passes—low places in high mountains. The Pamir mountains, which are very high, had only a few passes. But these passes weren't open all year: in winter, heavy snow covered them, so no one could go through. Travelers can only use them during spring and Autumn. A famous Chinese traveler called Xuanzang once got stuck near a Pamir pass because of its tremendous snow. He had to wait for weeks until the snow melted.

The fickle climate in the deserts also made travel hard. The days in deserts were very hot, but the nights were very cold. There was a big temperature difference. Sometimes, strong sandstorms came suddenly, covering the sky. For safety, the caravans didn't travel at noon and rests at noon when it's the hottest. They walked early in the morning and late in the afternoon. Sadly, some old Silk Road resting stations disappeared caused by the climate change. For example, the city of Loulan, that was once a prosperous and glorious station, was abandoned because the river that gave it water changed its path, the oasis around Loulan dried up.

The Maritime Silk Road, which followed coasts and crossed oceans, also relied heavily on nature. The most important thing for sea travelers was monsoons—strong winds that change direction with seasons. According to Song Dynasty documents “Lingwai Daida” and “Zhu Fan Zhi”, from November to March, the northeast monsoon prevails. Strong and stable winds facilitate the navigation of ships from the southeast coast of China to Southeast Asia and the Indian Ocean. From May to September, the southwest monsoon dominates, supporting ships to return China. According to meteorological research, the intensity of the monsoons in East Asia during the Tang and Song dynasties was more pronounced than modern times, with an average annual wind speed of 5 - 6 levels, providing natural power for long-distance voyages.

Coasts and ports also played a big role. A good port needed two key things: a bay to shelter ships from strong winds, and deep water for big boats to rest. Quanzhou was a perfect port because it has both—it’s sat near a river mouth, and the bay kept ships safe from storms.

Ocean currents (slow, steady flows of water) helped too. Ships could sail along these currents to go faster. For instance, when going from Guangzhou to Sri Lanka, following the South China Sea current made the trip shorter by more than ten days. Merchants in the Song Dynasty Without monsoons, good ports, and currents, the Maritime Silk Road would have been much harder or even impossible for ancient travelers.

Ancient travelers didn’t just submit to the nature, they found smart ways to deal with its challenges, whether on land or sea.

On the land Silk Road, camels became their most useful helpers. Camels can go without water for more continuously walk for a week without having to drink water and can walk easily on sand. They also have thick fur to protect them from the hot sun and cold nights. Caravans always took many camels, not just to carry goods, but also to lead the way through deserts. People also built “Karez” underground channels to irrigate and get water from mountains.

Looking back at the Silk Road’s long story, we can clearly see that it was never just a road for trade—it was a perfect example of how humans and nature can collaborate and work together. The natural environment didn’t just set rules for travelers; it also gave them gifts and supports. Oases offered water in dry deserts, monsoons filled sails to push ships forward, and mountain passes opened doors between distant lands. What touches me most is that ancient people didn’t try to fight against nature. Instead, they learned to read its signs, follow its rhythms, and use its strengths in smart, gentle ways. They didn’t cut down whole mountains to make new paths or change the wind’s direction. They simply chose the best routes through oases, waited for the right monsoons, and built tools that fit nature’s challenges. Today, when we talk about protecting the Silk Road’s heritage, this old wisdom still matters a lot. It reminds us that progress doesn’t mean controlling nature. True success comes from living with it, just like those old merchants and travelers did thousands of years ago. The Silk Road’s greatest lesson isn’t about silk or spices—it’s about the quiet, powerful magic of cooperation between humans and the world around them.

New Tales of China's Silk Road

HD Beijing School, Wang Yi Kun Yilia – 15

In the Western Han Dynasty of the 2nd century BC, the Central Plains and the countries to the west were separated by thousands of miles, with endless deserts, vast grasslands and the powerful Xiongnu tribes in between. People on both sides could neither travel nor communicate with each other. At that time, the Xiongnu frequently invaded the Han border from the south, seizing the food and property of these people, causing great suffering to the border residents and becoming a major headache for the Western Han court. In 139 BC, Emperor Wu of Han learned that the Dayuezhi Kingdom to the west had a deep-seated grudge against the Xiongnu – the Xiongnu had killed the king of Dayuezhi and seized their land, forcing the Dayuezhi people to move far away. He thus wanted to send someone to contact the Dayuezhi and join forces to attack the Xiongnu. This mission was extremely dangerous, requiring crossing the vast territory controlled by the Xiongnu and facing unknown dangers. None of the officials in the court dared to take it on, but Zhang Qian, a Langguan (an official position), stepped forward voluntarily. He became the first person to open up the Silk Road.

Zhang Qian was brave and resolute, and he was patient and steady in doing things. In 139 BC, he led a team of over a hundred people, carrying dry food and holding the token given by Emperor Wu of Han, setting off from Longxi and heading west. But not long after they crossed the border of the Han Dynasty, they were captured by the patrol soldiers of the Xiongnu. The Xiongnu detained all of them for a full ten years. The Xiongnu wanted Zhang Qian to surrender and submit, providing him with a stable residence and even marrying him to a Xiongnu woman. Later, they had a child together, hoping to wear down his will with a comfortable life. Most of his followers gradually gave up their original intentions, either surrendering or passing away, but Zhang Qian never forgot his mission and secretly kept the token given by Emperor Wu of Han all along, never thinking of giving up the task.

Facing the soft imprisonment by the Xiongnu, Zhang Qian did not become depressed but endeavored to overcome the difficulties. He took the initiative to learn the language of the Xiongnu, gradually understanding their living habits and the terrain and routes around them, and kept all the useful information in his mind. When faced with the Xiongnu's insult and questioning, he responded neither humbly nor arrogantly, neither escalating the conflict nor revealing the secrets of the Han Dynasty. There was also an interesting incident. Once, the Xiongnu chief held a banquet to test him and deliberately said that there was nothing good in the Han Dynasty. Zhang Qian smiled and responded, vividly describing the smooth and soft silk of the Han Dynasty, which was particularly comfortable to wear, as well as the exquisite and durable porcelain that was both beautiful and practical for holding things. He spoke so vividly and specifically that the Xiongnu were all fascinated. The chief even specially asked him to talk more about the customs and scenery of the Han Dynasty for a long time and developed a greater yearning for the Central Plains.

Ten years later, the Xiongnu's guard over Zhang Qian gradually slackened. He finally seized the opportunity and, with a few loyal followers, secretly escaped. The difficulties ahead were even greater than before. First, they had to overcome the problem of no water or food. In the desert, they couldn't find any grains, so they picked wild fruits and dug wild vegetables to eat. When there was nothing to eat, they endured hunger and kept moving forward. When thirsty, they searched for mountain springs and rivers. Sometimes, when they couldn't find water, they could only swallow their saliva and persist in moving forward. When encountering sandstorms, the sand blew so hard that they couldn't open their eyes. They would hold each other and lie on the ground, waiting for the sandstorm to pass before continuing their journey. At night, they had to be on guard against wild animal attacks. They took turns keeping watch and couldn't sleep soundly. With their indomitable will, they finally shook off the pursuit of the Xiongnu and headed westward, eventually finding the Kingdom of the Great Yuezhi.

It is a pity, however, that the Dayuezhi had already moved to a new homeland with fertile land and water, where the people lived and worked in peace and contentment. They no longer wanted to fight against the Xiongnu. Zhang Qian tried to persuade them for many days but failed to achieve the goal of forming an alliance. But his trip was not in vain. During the more than one year he spent in the Western Regions, he visited many countries including Dayuan and Daxia. When he couldn't communicate in language, he gestured to express himself and won the trust of the locals with his sincere attitude. In Dayuan, the king, who had long heard that the Han Dynasty was rich in products, was particularly enthusiastic when he met Zhang Qian. Not only did he present him with the famous blood-sweating horses, but also sent a guide to escort him on his journey. In Daxia, he unexpectedly saw bamboo sticks and cloth from Sichuan, Han Dynasty. After inquiring, he learned that they were brought there by merchants through many transactions. This incident made him even more convinced that opening an official trade route between the East and the West would benefit both sides.

In 126 BC, Zhang Qian returned to the Han Dynasty with a wealth of knowledge about the Western Regions. The team of over a hundred people that set out with him had, after thirteen years of hardship, been reduced to just himself and one follower. After hearing his detailed account, Emperor Wu of Han was both surprised and delighted, and immediately appointed him as a Grand Doctor. Later, in 119 BC, Emperor Wu sent him on a second mission to the Western Regions. This time, Zhang Qian led a team of over three hundred people, along with a large quantity of silk, tea, porcelain and other specialties of the Han Dynasty. Overcoming the difficulties of the long journey and the unfamiliar climate, he visited all the countries in the Western Regions and established friendly relations with them. The countries of the Western Regions also sent envoys to visit the Han Dynasty in return, bringing new species such as grapes, walnuts, carrots and pomegranates that were not found in the Central Plains, as well as the music, dance and rare treasures of the Western Regions.

Gradually, more and more merchants traveled along the route that Zhang Qian had taken for trade. The silk of the Han Dynasty was transported to the West along this road and was deeply loved by the nobles of various countries. This road was later officially named the "Silk Road" by later generations. Although Zhang Qian was not a merchant, he spent his entire life persistently opening up this legendary road connecting the East and the West.

His influence on later generations has spanned a thousand years and is profound. The Silk Road broke the isolation between the East and the West, allowing goods to be exchanged. The iron smelting and well-digging techniques from the Central Plains were introduced to the West, while the products and culture of the Western Regions were integrated into the Central Plains, promoting economic development and cultural exchange among various countries. It was not merely a trade route but also a road of friendship and civilization, enabling people from different places to understand and tolerate each other. Sima Qian, in his “Records of the Grand Historian,” referred to Zhang Qian’s feat as “opening up the void,” meaning “opening up a great path,” which is a high recognition of his pioneering contribution. Zhang Qian’s spirit of not fearing difficulties and adhering to his mission has always inspired later generations to be brave in exploration and bold in innovation. Today, the Silk Road remains a symbol of world cultural exchange. The bridge between the East and the West that Zhang Qian built with courage and perseverance is forever remembered by the world, and it also teaches us that only by facing difficulties head-on and persisting can every brave exploration open up new possibilities for the world.

The Singing Horizon: Shaping the New Stories of China's Silk Road

Pui Ching Middle School (Macau), Liu Kai Yan Eric – 16

The wind that blows over the Hexi Corridor is no different from what it was twenty centuries ago. It continues to carry the coarse grit of the Gobi, and howled down the narrow ravines of the Qilian range, to a lonely melody that had echoed beside the steady clatter of the feet of Bactrian camels. However, if you listen now, underneath that primordial roaring sound, there's another sound pulsing in the ground. It's an electrical buzz. It's the noise of magnetism lifting things up. It's the noise of high speed engines running at great speeds. It's the noise of information traveling in wires far below our desert sands. It's what we hear today, a sonata in which the cadence of the Han dynasty blends with the rhythm of the twenty-first century's factories. To talk about New Tales of China's Silk Road, therefore, is not simply to tell a story of a series of infrastructure investments or trade pacts. Instead, it is to describe a deeply philosophical and physical re-imagining of how the East engages with the rest of the world. It's a tale of rebirth, where the dust-covered maps of the past are being redrawn with the new ink of creativity, connectivity and international cooperation.

To know the new, you have to kneel before the new. The Silk Road was never just a trading highway. It was the world's first information superhighway, a brittle but enduring conduit by which Buddhism, paper-making, gunpowder, and philosophy poured alongside silk and spices. Standing beneath the Giant Wild Goose Pagoda in Xi'an, one can almost feel the ghosts of Sogdian merchants and Tang poets brushing past. Nevertheless, there is a tendency in looking back at that golden age to forget how dangerous, slow, and fragmentary that journey actually was. What makes up the New Tale, which we are now living out, is the overcoming of all those constraints. The new Silk Road, also known as the Belt and Road Initiative, in particular, is about collapsing time and space, reducing dangerous month-long journeys by Marco Polo to hours, or even seconds in cyberspace.

The most palpable hero of this new story, however, is the Iron Camel Caravan, China-Europe Railway Express. Not only is it a logistics wonder, it's also an amazing engineering achievement against the backdrop of the immense Eurasian continent. Envision the view from the Khorgos Gateway, a dry port at the frontier between China and Kazakhstan. It used to be an isolated outpost where the steppe met the sky. Now it is a city of cranes and containers. It is here that the standard gauge tracks of China meet the broad gauge of the former Soviet bloc. Giant gantries lift containers like a watchmaker's hands, shipping cargo to London, Madrid or Warsaw.

It is this mechanical dance that reflects a change in the world's center of economic gravity. I remember reading an article on a train leaving Yiwu, carrying no longer bales of raw silk, but rather laptops, solar panels and medical instruments across a land as wide as Russia, the forests of Poland, and the industrial heartlands of Germany, arriving in Spain in less than three weeks. This is the material body of the new story—a resilience that bypasses the choke points of sea-borne commerce. The Iron Silk Road kept on ticking away with its regular rhythm even when the Suez Canal got closed down. When the shipping routes were hit by storms, it's a tale of predictability amid rising uncertainty, proving to the world that the connection of land from the Pacific to the Atlantic is not an antiquated concept, but as essential now as ever before.

However, the steel tracks are just the skeleton of a new body. The nervous system is digital. Digital Silk Road may be the most transformational feature of this new epic, but you cannot see this by eye. It is written in the language of 5G networks, clouds and AI. In a traditional market in Samarkand or Kashgar, where merchants used to barter for the price of tea with silver coins, people now pay immediately by scanning a QR code on their mobile phones and using digital payment apps. Technology leapfrogging could be changing the future of many countries on this path.

The story of the new Silk Road should include the existential issue for our times, environmental crisis. The old road was a war with nature. The new route has to be a partner with it. As a result, we come to the Green Silk Road. The sun in the Gansu and Xinjiang deserts is fierce beyond words; a new kind of harvest is gathering. In endless rows they extend towards the horizon—blue waves on a sea of sand, PV modules are installed in the desert. The solar farmlands and the massive windmills piercing the horizon are providing the renewable power for the servers and trains of a digital future.

This pivot toward green energy isn't purely economic; it also has moral dimensions that are embedded in this new storyline. China's pledge to export its green technology—specifically, hydroelectricity to Southeast Asia and wind energy expertise to Africa—changes the role of the Silk Road. It's not just extraction and consumption anymore. It's about sustainability. I think that in the future we'll be running those caravans on hydrogen and doing those infrastructure projects with no carbon footprint. It's our New Story, which this generation wants to tell. It's a tale in which growth need not to be destructive to the Earth, but more like a trigger to its conservation.

Amid the steel, silicon and solar panels, let us not forget that this is ultimately a human story. The ancient Silk Road was, first and foremost, a channel of human communication. It is here that the Greco-Roman art of sculpture encountered Buddhist theology and produced the sublime statues of the Mo Gao Caves. Nowadays, this culture of exchange is coming back to life. The New Stories are written in the classrooms at universities attended by international BRI-country engineering students, literature, and medicine. These texts are produced at the co-archaeological sites where Chinese archaeologists and foreign scholars jointly engage themselves in excavating and protecting the cultural relics of the past civilization.

Whereas infrastructure is the body of the link, culture is its soul. Language, artistic, and food exchanges dissolve the biases created in silos. In an era which feels more polarized than ever, both geographically and politically, the spirit of the Silk Road—mutual benefit and peaceful co-existence—offers a counter-narrative of hope.

However, it would be remiss if I said there weren't problems with the New Silk Road. With the intricacy of different jurisdictions, the risks of debt sustainability for participating nations, and the geopolitical skepticism of some Western powers, it is a story with its own conflicts, too. These are the conflicts in the plot, the hurdles to overcome. But just as the old caravanseraï faced bandits and sandstorms, today's Silk Road builders face regulatory hurdles and political headwinds. The difference is that we have more powerful tools at our disposal. By working together through multilateralism and with open governance, all of this is happening and transforming the project from just building to something more impactful for global governance.

Let's focus now on the particular role played by the Greater Bay Area and Hong Kong within this big picture. Hong Kong, being uniquely positioned to act as a super-connector, is the modern equivalent of that ancient caravanseraï, where East meets West in finance, law, and culture. The city is the financing center for those massive infrastructure projects, the hub of dispute resolution, and the crossroads in which the New Tales are selected and disseminated into

the world. For us students who live in this metropolis, we do not need to travel far from home to understand the significance of the Silk Road. It's all around us. In the port, one of the busiest in the world, handles cargo from every port along the maritime corridor. We see it in our skyline, created by companies who are also building bridges in Bangladesh or rail lines in Kenya.

The New Tales of China's Silk Road cannot be easily described as just a road for trading. It also comprised several different dimensions including technology, environment and man. It is the rumble of the freight train across the hush of the steppes. It is the invisible heartbeat of information linking an acreage owner in Xi'an with a buyer in Rotterdam. It is the gleam of sunlight upon a solar panel in the desert, and it is the sound of students laughing over lunch at a university cafeteria.

For a high school student who lives in this age, the story is inspiring. It indicates that the world does not get smaller and smaller. Instead, it gets closer and closer. It urges us to look across the borders, to appreciate connectivity rather than isolation, and to realize that we do not inherit from our past any museum-piece culture. The Silk Road has always been a tale of human hubris, the desire to see what's on the other side of the hill. That vision today has been armed with the tools of the fourth industrial revolution, but we carry the same spirit and we are the new travelers, the new merchants of ideas, and the new chroniclers of this eternal journey. The camel bells are gone, but the road is there, wider and faster than ever before calling out for you to write the next page in the story of humankind.

This juxtaposition of the old and the hyper-modern is nowhere clearer than in the changes seen in the cities along the way. For instance, Lanzhou, once an important crossing point on the Yellow River for weary caravans, is now a sprawling petrochemical and logistics complex. But amidst the towers and the high-speed rail station that resembles a spaceship landed on earth, the aroma of beef noodles continues to float in the morning breeze, connecting us to merchants who traveled these routes hundreds of years ago, many of whom were Hui Muslims. Such continuity in an age of accelerated modernity defines the soul of the New Silk Road. It shows that progress doesn't have to come at the cost of losing one's heritage. Instead, it gives them a chance to showcase those local identities on to an international stage through the New Silk Road.

New Stories redefine what is meant by remote inland areas. Traditionally, Coastal areas in classic economic geography were rich centers, while the inland was considered the periphery. The New Silk Road inverts that script. Connecting the landlocked countries of Central Asia and the interior provinces of China to Europe, it's making the middle of nowhere become the middle of everywhere. It is a very significant change in the geopolitical map. Cities such as Chongqing or Chengdu are not only inland factories anymore. They have become global logistics nodes. The train leaving Chengdu, transporting locally-produced electronics from the USA to Lodz, Poland, is an example of this reversal in economics. A story of inclusion brings wealth to areas that have been left out during the era of sea-based globalism.

Looking back at the New Tales, I am struck by the fact that we are living in a historic pivot-point. Future historians will look back at our times much like how we look back at Han and Tang dynasties, seeing them as an epoch during which the world started to re-knit itself together from its disintegration over several centuries. They will read the New Tales not as fiction, but as the founding instruments of a multipolar world. Therefore, we as the youth, have an obligation to tell their stories honorably and to ensure that they aren't forgotten by simply doing nothing ourselves. Whether or not we will be the engineers who build the next bullet train, the ambassadors that broker the trade agreements, or the journalists who tell the human stories, we are the heirs to the Silk Road and its future is our future.

To sum up, the New Silk Road is a mirror that reflects what we want to see in this new world, a new world where trade produces wealth, where technology brings us together, and where culture teaches us to understand each other. It is a story still being told one chapter at a time, track by track, and byte by byte. And with sunset on the dunes of the Taklamakan, long shadows on the fiber-optic cable and the steel rail, there is one thing we know, it goes on. The spirit of exploration, the hunger to connect, the resilience of the human spirit all serve as the ink from which these New Tales have been written. They are tales of a road that has no end, only new horizons.

Non-Fiction

Group 4



From Medieval to Modern - How the Silk Road serves as the Catalyst for Connection and Collaboration

HKUGA College, Liu Yau Nam Justin – 15

In 2011, two scientists, Frachetti and Farhod Maksudov of the National Center of Archaeology in Samarkand stumbled on a small medieval area amidst the jagged and sharply chiseled Uzbekistan mountains. The area consisted of stone fortifications, an area for metal and craft production, and a cemetery. Researchers aimed to unfold previous metropolises during the Silk Road, and gain insight regarding nomadic settlements during the Medieval Ages. These settlements may have played a paramount role in transporting goods, technologies and faiths in the lucrative region. As the team dug, they unravelled an iron foundry that consisted of multiple furnace-like structures. The area nested plentiful ore deposits, and the site, which was named Tugunbulak, was likely a major producer and exporter of iron objects such as armor, spurs, and utensils, likely prized all over Central Asia.

In fact, further research demonstrated that this “lost city” could have been a major trading hub during the Medieval Silk Road, merchants traversing the vast and sparsely populated terrain in search of fortune, silk, and other foreign objects. Since then, archaeological digs have revealed coins from around the region as well as the remains of elderly and young inhabitants. These were remnants of the heyday of the fabled Silk Road, with ancient structures tantalising volunteers that stumbled on this land, which were surprisingly unfound over the vast course of the modern Silk Road. The products that were produced in this area could circulate over a vast Eurasia network, from Manchuria to the Mediterranean, and serves to us a message: There are many things that we have not elucidated about the Silk Road, and this trading route spanning multiple generations is one that heavily influences modern geopolitical relationships.

Understanding the Silk Road introduces us to the immense potential of cross-country competition and joint efforts, by proving humankind’s capability in synchronising diverse ideas into a tight-knitted web. Through obtaining insight on different major hubs of the Silk Road, we are more empowered to leverage the advantages of each nation in trading, sparking brand new opportunities in commerce. Knowing more about the One Belt One Road Initiative, equivalent to the modern Silk Road, helps us to identify what nations have done to promote unimpeded trade and personnel exchanges.

The Silk Road was a prominent route that spanned from the metropolis of East Asia to the crystalline waters of Europe. It, in some way, defined religion, culture, and the cohesion of ideas branching from different parts of the world. Skilled artisans from regions such as China, Persia, India, Central Asia, and the Mediterranean engaged in the exchange of techniques, styles, and artistic motifs. In the past, philosophical concepts of Buddhism and Christianity were widespread across these commercial paths, with monasteries, churches and various places emerging as places for religion transmission.

All this exchange in religion and philosophy originated from one, remarkable object, silk. Silk was originally a Chinese good, woven from the protein fibre produced by the silkworm as it makes its cocoon. Individuals with high social status utilised silk structures to form cloths, drapes, banners, and other items of prestige. With ancient China being quite closed off due to its geographical location, imperial decrees sentenced to death anyone who revealed to foreigners their production processes. However, as silk became essential to royals and aristocrats, the Chinese craftsmanship became an early impetus and push factor for the development of trading routes from Europe to the Far East. This drove increased communication and chances for exchange between different nations, as they bargained for silk and the riches that came with it. Amongst the mountains and stone paved roads that line this conduit of culture though, there were a few notable cities, once serving as the crossroads of East and West.

Dunhuang is well known for being the “starting point” of the Silk Road, in which a sizable Buddhist community carved the Mogao Grottoes out of sand and mud – a site for worship and pilgrimage, where the cave paintings could serve as enlightenment, as teaching devices to inform those illiterate, or as narratives for Buddhist culture. The murals in these caves exemplify the fusion of cultures, like the “Flying Apsaras” (Feitian) which show a blend of Indian, Central Asian, and Chinese artistic styles. Scrolls that were scattered around the cave included merchant caravans, written in Sogdian, Uighur, or Turco-Sogdian, with a range of imported goods including lapis lazuli from North-East Afghanistan, agate from India, or pearl from Sri Lanka. Spanning the years of the Silk Road, several Christian, Jewish, and Manichaean artifacts have also been found in the caves, testimonies for those who went all the way to the Eastern part of the world. Nearly sixty thousand pieces of precious cultural relics between the 4th and the 14th centuries have been found from the grottoes by far. These relics include manuscripts, paintings and prints, attesting to the multicultural nature of the region with scripts in Sanskrit, Hebrew and more. There are also remnants of cave temples, carved into a cliff face in a hybrid of Buddhist and Taoist styles. It demonstrates that Dunhuang was a carrefour for trade. The oasis city was a crucial point for merchants, pilgrims, and soldiers, as a rest point to gather supplies and exchange exquisite goods after traversing the vast and arid deserts for Central Asia.

Constantinople was another notable city in the Silk Road, in which aristocrats and wealthy merchants gathered in search of fame and fortune. This city was first known for Christian relics, when Constantine the Great of the Roman Empire issued the Edict of Milan in 312 A.D, which placed Christianity as the official state religion of the Roman Empire. The emperor had solidified power and cemented Christianity into the Byzantine Empire. When the city of Constantinople was attacked, people believed that the presence of holy relics of Christian figures helped to protect them. The prevalence of religion led to pilgrimages which brought inhabitants entering the Middle East and Persia in search of medieval relics. Another pertinent object that moved in and out of Constantinople was silk. Women from wealthy Roman families became frantic about silk, paying large sums of money to obtain them. Silk purchases ultimately accounted for a large drain upon the Byzantine treasury. The desire for silk then fostered and facilitated Chinese merchants to traverse the long way to Persia or even Constantinople, bringing back Nestorian Christianity to China. Constantinople therefore served as a center for religion, due to its superior location in the crossroads between Persia, the Middle East, and Europe. Values, ideas and ethics that constitute the society that we live in now were derived from this exchange in religion, demonstrating Constantinople’s significance to the Eurasian continent.

And there were the Mongols, who reinvigorated the flow of goods amongst continents and countries, while leveraging its position in Asia to conquer territory. The Silk Road's influence did not stop at the trade of goods and military might—it completely reshaped kitchens. Spices like cardamom and saffron, sweets like halva, dried fruits, nuts, and even noodles crisscrossed the continent. Many meals that we enjoy, from Turkish delicacies to Chinese dishes, still contain a hint of the Silk Road. Through the increasing dominance of Central Asian powers, cities like Samarkand thrived, with facades covered in colourful mosaics and domes that pushed engineering abilities to their limits, becoming a glittering metropolis. The design of Samarkand consists of monuments covered intricately with patterns and shapes, with large squares that could house millions of people. These architectural designs can still be seen in Persian, Turkish and even some Islamic countries, demonstrating the importance of the Silk Road in shaping our world. Scientific hubs such as Ulugh Beg Observatory in Samarkand hosted one of the greatest astronomers during the Silk Road, where celestial concepts such as deities of the five planets, calendrical charts, and the association of divination with fortune spread across Asia and are still prominent in feng shui in the 21st century. Last but not least, paper was a commodity widely traded in Samarkand, due to its “silk-like”, elegant texture but relatively less costly. Samarkand emerged as a center of intellectual exchange, attracting scholars and thinkers from various corners of the Silk Road. The city became a beacon of cultural dissemination, no matter in the fields of medicine, science, architecture, or cuisine, playing an important role in the development of culture in Asia, with enduring impacts on the broader currents of global history.

The Silk Road encouraged cultural integration in the Middle Ages, laying a foundation for society and our daily habits. Far-flung cultures were bridged together, leaving an indelible mark on the civilisations that constitute the Silk Road. Cities and merchants were enriched with riches which led to the further development of civilisations and strong nations such as the Timurid Empire, Moghulistan and the Ming Dynasty. Although the Silk Road slowly faded with countries turning to solidify their own strength instead of frantic trading, remnants of these routes can still be found, giving rise to new innovations and technologies. These routes also led to marriage alliances as a diplomatic strategy, leading to cross-cultural diffusion and mingling of different ethnic groups. And from a not-so-optimistic perspective, diseases and epidemics were also spread throughout the Silk Road. One of the most prominent examples is the Black Death, which metastasised from Central Asia and the Middle East to Europe through fleas and infected rodents. These characteristics all lead to the same conclusion – the Silk Road is important in shaping our surroundings. From the buildings we reside in, to the food that we enjoy, to traditional artifacts that are venerated, we all are deeply connected to this Road.

But the Silk Road is not just about culture in its essence. It brings in the idea of diplomacy, politics and international relations.

During September 2013, Xi Jinping, president of the People's Republic of China, mentioned the “One Belt One Road Initiative”, an unprecedented feat that aims to create an economical corridor that traverses East Asia, Western Asia, and even some parts of Europe. This idea was inspired by the cultural exchanges during the Silk Road. Through policy discussions, integration of facilities, and financing decisions, China has become an important pioneer in fostering collective growth in the Eurasian continent. This has been referred to as the Modern Silk Road, transcending geographical boundaries and uniting nations to form a network of support, innovation, and collective growth.

There are many success stories in demonstrating the impact of the initiative in shaping global trading networks, ultimately leading to prosperity. One example is the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, which aims to address energy shortages in Pakistan, while modernising transport and promoting sustainable industrial development. The Corridor focuses on the development of the Gwadar deep-sea port, building powerplants, and constructing new, durable transmission lines. There has also been cooperation in aquaculture, agricultural mechanisation, and space research, nurturing multi-national scientists and technicians. Through these concerted efforts, Pakistan has attracted billions of dollars in foreign direct investment, while forming strong linkages between China and the Arabian Sea, benefiting economical acceleration. Albeit the project may face concerns of turmoil and insufficient funds, it has been a great leap forward in promoting cross-country cohesion and communication.

This initiative also helps support marginalised and less privileged countries in improving their trade and increasing their connections to the world. A notable case is the China-Laos Railway, where Kunming, a cultural hub of China is bridged with Vientiane, the capital of Laos. Data from its operators, Laos-China Railway Co. and China Railway Kunming Group, demonstrate bustling trade within this route. The cross-border railway has handled 21 million tonnes of cargo and 16.4 million passenger trips over the 18 months since its opening. This has sparked tourism and increased investors' interest in capital injection towards country initiatives. Moreover, various job opportunities have been created for the smooth running of the railway. Once, cross-border travel could take weeks with the jugged terrain of Laos and relatively lacking infrastructure in the country. But now, visitors and residents can travel between China and Laos in mere hours. This amplifies cohesion between the two countries, promoting future possibilities of agricultural and real-estate development. It can even be said that the One Belt One Road ambition has driven noticeable ties between countries, speeding up further globalisation and creating a supportive network.

With this initiative, countries devote time and resources into policy coordination. Mechanisms of intergovernmental macro-policy exchange and mutual trust have been built. Central Asian countries have adjusted their regional cooperation and economic development policies for the projects of the One Belt One Road to run smoothly. Looking back, this echoes with the Silk Road, thousands of years ago. The camels that carried travellers and caravans that merchants banded together have become railways that span continents, where pioneers can easily embark on odysseys from China to Europe, and vice versa. Caravanserais, fortified inns that provided vital hubs for safety and social interaction became the towns and cities that shaped the Silk Road, with negotiations, trade policies and pacts slowly drafted to spark economic growth. Former raw materials such as gold, ivory, and fervent obsessions of luxurious Chinese silk, became the constant and effective exchange of capital, technology and industrial goods. The One Belt One Road Initiative, which has been focal in inspiring collective growth of the continents, was deeply inspired by the historical Silk Road trade routes. The Silk Road slowly collapsed in the 1400s due to political instability, such as the fragmentation of power caused by the Mongol Empire and hostile relations between the Ottomans, depleting relations and exchanges between those rivals. This One Belt One Road initiative reenlightened this route, reconciling and reconnecting countries through capital injections, subsidies and mutual benefit. It serves as a model that although our world is a potpourri of cultures seemingly detached from each other, we are capable in transcending geographical boundaries and distinct national interests, focusing instead on a synergistic approach to problem-solving or opportunity realisation through infrastructure development, maritime integration, and health-technology support.

There are many unsolved mysteries about the Silk Road that await us to unravel. One notable field is regarding genetics. For decades, the Tarin Basin Mummies in Xinjiang were thought to be Indo-Eurasian inhabitants. However, landmark DNA studies published in *Nature* revealed they were actually a genetically isolated group descended from a now-extinct Ice Age population called the Ancient North Eurasians. How they maintained such genetic isolation while being culturally up-to-date, adopting Western farming and dairy techniques, remains a major point of inquiry. This further demonstrates how many nomadic tribes that resided near the trading routes may not be Central Asian or Caucasian which we may believe, but from vast regions in Eurasia which fuelled the mingling of cultures. Another genomic study showed that some individuals who resided in Dunhuang had up to 50% Western Eurasian ancestry, yet were seemingly unnoticed and buried en masse, Chinese-dominant cemeteries. This allows us to delve deep into the fact that the cultural integration that occurred in the areas of the Silk Road was deep-rooted and seamlessly fused into our lives.

Speaking of cultural connections, the economic significance of many goods such as spices, metal equipment, and glass are still to be revealed. Scientists mainly concentrate on the transmission of Silk and how it affected the cultural scene during the Middle Ages. On the other hand, other products such as porcelain or wool textiles were relatively neglected by most researchers. Their importance and occupancy cannot be denied though, so it would be intriguing to gain first-hand knowledge on how these seemingly lesser products catalysed the development of the Silk Road. What we surely know is that these artefacts played a significant influence in navigating cultural perplexity, leading to the “fusion” of ideas that we refer to now.

On a slightly pessimistic note, the pathogens transferred in the Silk Road, which constitutes biological corridors for diseases and risk conditions, are still unclear. For example, Behçet’s Disease, which was almost clustered exclusively along the Silk Road, has its gene mutation cause unknown. The environmental agent, such as the abundance of minerals or specific chemicals that activated the disease is still to be unravelled. Researchers believe the genetic predisposition, particularly the HLA-B51 gene, migrated along these ancient routes, mirroring the disease’s distribution. However, this specific gene was also found in individuals without Behçet’s Disease. Recent research from the University of Stirling also found that the Black Death was caused by a volcanic eruption which destabilized fleas and rodents who attached onto human surfaces or caravans. However, the exact location and time of the volcanic eruption, as well as how it coordinated with trade routes to transmit the disease to Europe was still unknown. Knowing this information assists us in understanding how we are genetically predisposed and connected in different ways, aiding our knowledge in heredity and genetic evolution.

The Silk Road eclipses geographical and historical boundaries through creating numerous land and maritime routes. It plays a requisite role in cultural exchange and amalgamation. The meals we eat, the clothes we wear, even the technology that we take for granted; They all may contain a hint of the goods that were exchanged during the time. This has profoundly shaped civilisations and countries across the globe, and aided in spreading religion, art styles, and the flow of ideas. This dynamic system sparked the growth of multicultural cities and trading hubs along the path, with middlemen and merchants travelling arduous and dangerous paths, fostering economic and societal growth. The essence of the Silk Road was brought to the One Belt One Road initiative, in which China, as the main provider, accommodated various regions with infrastructure support and monetary loans. We are all connected in different ways. No matter the vast differences on the surface, our culture and beliefs may have been greatly influenced by the Silk Road and the notions that wandered thousands of miles into our heart.

Debt & Diplomacy and Discontent: Tales of China's New Silk Road

Victoria Shanghai Academy, van Olphen, Pieter Mahmoud Dani – 14

In the labyrinthine corridor of human history, one civilization shines iridescently as a beacon of both development and progress. This civilization lies in the heart of the East—the Middle Kingdom (中國, so named because ancient China believed itself to be the center of the world, the axis around which heaven and earth turned. From the invention of paper to the Silk Road, China has had a transformative impact on the world as it is today. Among its ingenious inventions and contributions, one of the most momentous contributions was what we know today as the Silk Road.

The Silk Road was never just a single route or path, yet it was an intricate network of routes used by traders for more than 1,500 years. Along the route, goods like silk, spices, tea, porcelain, and other goods flowed westward while gold, glassware, and wool flowed eastward. (National Geographic Society) However, the Silk Road was so much more than just a network of trading routes to trade goods; it also carried the exchanges of culture, religion, language, and technologies. Buddhism, for example, is the largest officially recognized religion in China, spread from India to China. (Nadeem) China's papermaking technology enabled the widespread manuscript culture in works such as *One Thousand and One Nights*, which have had a significant impact on global literature. (BrixSweden) For more than 1,500 years, the Silk Road shaped the evolution of civilizations throughout Eurasia, making it one of the first and most significant instances of globalization.

While the Silk Road was about connecting the world, China's greatest teachings often focused on mastering the self before trying to shape others. One of the most world-renowned Chinese philosophers and the founder of Taoism once said: "Mastering others is strength; mastering yourself is true power". This quote reminds us that the Silk Road was shaped not only by trade but also by influence, yet the inner development and moderation were the key philosophies of China. It is a contrast of the economic drive of the Silk Road, which implies that the real power can lie within a person, not in the conquering. This conflict between internal principles and external authority remains a burning issue even nowadays, particularly in the context of the manner in which China is shaping its new Silk Road: the Belt and Road Initiative. Today, as China builds a new Silk Road through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), this conflict emerges: is the initiative a form of cooperative connection, or a projection of control?

Now it's the 21st century, and the Silk Road has been re-envisioned as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), an expansive generation-defining project that is meant to transform international trade, diplomacy and infrastructure. This new Silk Road does share some differences with its past forerunner. For starters, the modern Silk Road encompasses many of the same regions as its ancient predecessor, but in far different ways. Starting out in China, moving along to the tropical archipelagos of Southeast Asia, to the culturally rich Indian Subcontinent, and ending in the endless savannahs of East Africa

In this essay, I will explore the New Silk Road through a sequence of case studies that trace China's expanding economic presence from Southeast Asia to Eastern Europe. By examining how the Belt and Road Initiative has evolved from a legacy of connection into a modern strategy of dominance, I will offer a counter-perspective on its geopolitical and economic implications, while applying a philosophical lens to uncover the deeper motivations behind this generation-defining project.

The first region I will explore is Southeast Asia, a vital hub for the BRI due to its geographical location, linking land and sea trade routes. While the infrastructure gap and demand for industrial input also make it an interesting trading partner for China (Jie and Hong), one key example, Laos, is the only landlocked nation in Southeast Asia, heavily dependent on its neighbours for port access and trade. (75) The Laos-China Railway exemplifies this dynamic. Opened in December of 2021, the 414 km railway runs from Kunming, China, to Vientiane, Laos. For Laos, the project can be framed as a positive way of integrating with China while expanding its trading network. With Lao Politicians advocating for the partnership, as it is a form of cooperative connection. With exports to China up 24.1% and over 60 million tons of cargo moved by 2025, the railway enhances trade capacity and puts Laos as a manufacturing hub. (ASEAN Briefing) Additionally, \$5.7 billion is currently being invested in special economic zones, attracting foreign trade. (ASEAN Briefing) However, the cost of the project is estimated to be \$6 billion, which is staggering for a country with a GDP of around \$16.5 billion, amounting to over 36% of its entire economy. ("Laos - National Debt in Relation to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) 2017-2027") The railway is being operated by a joint venture in which China holds a 70% stake, and Laos has the remaining 30%. ("Transforming Lao PDR from a Land-Locked to a Land-Linked Economy") This gives China significant control over Laos' critical infrastructure, resulting in Laos' Debt-GDP ratio to surge by 100%, raising concerns about long-term economic sovereignty. ("Laos - National Debt in Relation to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) 2017-2027") This case shows the duality of the BRI; on one hand, it is a bridge of connectivity, linking Laos to a wider pool for trade; on the other, a lever used for dominance and power. While Lao elites and officials promote the railway as a sign of cooperative connection, the sheer scale of Chinese ownership and influence over the infrastructure and the financial risk opens the door for questions about dependency.

The next region I will explore is the Indian Subcontinent, which is of importance for the BRI, because a significant fraction of China's energy imports passes through this region. Sri Lanka lies at the crossroads of the major shipping lanes between East and West in the Indian Ocean and has provided China the opportunity to safeguard these shipping routes and reduce possible vulnerabilities at other maritime choke points, such as the Strait of Malacca, by developing Sri Lankan ports. The Hambantota Port exemplifies this dynamic. Opened in 2010 in response to increasing congestion at the country's main port, Colombo. Hambantota was hoped to be the key hub for trade, but struggled initially to attract foreign investment. China was one of the few nations to express interest, due to the strategic location of the port. Sri Lanka welcomed such investment and saw the project as an instance of cooperative connection and a means to incorporate itself into global trade networks. Nevertheless, the case raises the question as to whether this is a bridge to shared development or a lever of subtle dominance. The port did not attract enough maritime traffic and revenue: in 2012, only 34 vessels called at Hambantota, compared with 3,667 at Colombo. (Abi-Habib) By 2016, the port recorded an operating profit of only \$1.81 million, deemed economically unviable, and as a result, Sri Lanka transferred the control of the port to China Merchants Port in 2017. ("Hambantota Port Sale in Perspective - News Features | Daily Mirror") China Merchants Port had an 80%

stake in the project and paid Sri Lanka \$1.2 billion in return. This transfer has raised concerns about China's significant control over the asset and major trade routes. However, this case is not as straightforward as Laos, as there was significant political entanglement as well. Sri Lanka had borrowed at an extremely high interest rate of 6.8%, and at least \$7.6 million from a Chinese company was funnelled into Mahinda Rajapaksa's 2015 re-election campaign. (Abi-Habib) While on the surface, Sri Lanka appeared to be buried in debt, the deal also served the interests of government elites. Hambantota reveals a further duality in China's relationships with its BRI partners, while in Lao, it was the economy of the entire nation that benefited, whereas in this instance, it only seems to serve the elites, revealing that China is not always aiming to boost countries' economies as a whole but also create ties with the highest class of governments.

Moving on to the final region in this essay is East Africa. It is a critical area of the BRI due to its strategic position along one of the biggest and busiest maritime routes in the world, the Red Sea route, connecting the Indian Ocean with Europe as well as the Suez Canal. A significant amount of Chinese and international trade, especially energy imports from the Middle East and exports to European markets, is handled along this corridor. Djibouti, a small but crucial country at the mouth of the Bab el-Mandeb Strait, becomes an essential asset in this geopolitical strategy. Djibouti provides China with a foothold along the Bab el-Mandeb Strait. For China, securing influence in an area like East Africa is not just strategic but essential for the BRI. While taking into account that 80% of Djibouti's GDP is reliant on ports and 90% of all imports are transported via sea, securing any access in Djibouti would put China forward as a pivotal player in the geopolitical atmosphere in East Africa. (Dept) (CGTN Global Watch) Over the last decade, Chinese involvement in Djibouti has accelerated significantly, making the country a perfect example of a nation that has secured a partnership with China through the BRI. In 2013, China Merchants Port took a 23.5% stake in Doraleh Port, and in 2017, the operation of the Doraleh Multi-Purpose Port (DMP) began. (CGTN Global Watch) This modern terminal has six versatile berths, a tug-boat dock and a floating dock and has a throughput capacity of \$7.08 million tonnes of bulk cargo. (CMP) Situated next to the port, China enabled the creation of the Djibouti International Free Trade Zone (DIFTZ), covering an area of 48.2 km², which is supposed to serve as a financial, logistical, and manufacturing centre for Djibouti. The initiative is backed by the support of the Djiboutian government and Chinese investment, with the goal of replicating the developmental success of Shenzhen and other Chinese special economic zones. (CMP) Concurrently in 2017, China opened its first overseas military installation in Djibouti, just a few kilometres from the port; this is a development that has raised concerns among Western powers, especially the United States, which is where their only military base in Africa is located. ("China's Overseas Military Base in Djibouti: Features, Motivations, and Policy Implications - Jamestown") Although these developments have brought economic benefits, such as improvements in infrastructure, capacity for expanded trade, and bringing in more than sixty enterprises to the DIFTZ, the geopolitical implications are substantial. In 2018, Djibouti ended a thirty-year concession with the DP World of Dubai to run the Doraleh Container Terminal, to be handed over to a Chinese company. This already raises concerns about the nature of such a decision to hand this port over to China and the role of such a Chinese company in the acquisition of a crucial national asset. With President Ismail Guelleh, who has been in power since 1999 despite the continued allegations of repression and electoral fraud, China has helped strengthen structures of authoritarian regimes and, at the same time, weakened Western influence in the region. (Staff Reporter) Djibouti's alignment with Beijing seems less like a balanced partnership and more like a strategic alignment driven by elite interests and internal pressure, given the state's dominance over the media and the widespread exile of the opposition. The alignment between infrastructure

investment and military positioning suggests that, rather than building an atmosphere of cooperation, the Belt and Road Initiative in Djibouti is being used as a tool of geopolitical control, serving the interests of China's global ambitions.

Overall, at the beginning of this essay, I had argued that the BRI, as the New Silk Road, possibly was in some ways like its ancient forerunner. However, after taking a deeper look at some of the regions that are of vital importance to the initiative, the case is not as simple as that. There is no black and white structure to this New Silk Road; it's full of many grey areas. From my first case study, looking at South East Asia, I found that while the majority of focus from the public was put on tourism and investment that the new railway provided, it often looked the other way when it came to the amount of control China had over such a critical asset and the amount of debt Laos is in because of this project. This was also the same case with the exploration of the Indian Subcontinent, with Hambantota, the port that was handed over to China in Sri Lanka. China had taken over everything, taken the burden off Sri Lanka's back, yet they were still significantly in debt, and the assets were all in China's hands. Additionally, with another port on the other side of the world, it was very much the same case but with more nuance. In East Africa, the Djiboutian port that China had a minority stake in had also benefited them greatly, with enterprises coming into their international free trade zones left, right and center. However, under that picture-perfect illusion, China had not only strengthened an authoritarian regime that oppressed the nation but also increased its military presence. This only makes China even more powerful than it already is, and drives democratic voices away. Overall, China does undeniably bring in development to these countries, but with strings attached – the money, ownership, and influence all belong to China. As I had mentioned in the introduction, this essay was meant to discover if the BRI was a tool of cooperative connection or a projection of control. However, the answer still remains ambiguous. The BRI demonstrates in a perfect way the grey area between partnership and power play. Although China does bring roads, railways, and ports to these participating nations, it is always hidden under the massive amount of concessional loans and ownership contracts. So to answer this question effectively, without seeing the long-term reality play out, we can not naively believe that this is solely for shared opportunities and progress. Without seeing China's ability to master itself, its power is yet to be defined.

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Non-Fiction

Group 5



The Allure of China's Silk Road

ESF King George V School, Edward Yang – 16

Contrary to its semantic literalism, the ancient Silk Road was not a solitary path, but rather an interminable network of Eurasian trade routes that achieved a pluricontinental influence, transcending cultural divides. The Silk Road facilitated the establishment of China's global presence and forged an aperture to China's isolated economy. Notably, economic exchanges catalysed by such trade routes were characterised by the commutation of Chinese luxuries and the dissemination of dogmatic principles and religious doctrines. In the present day, China positions their focal point to revive the Silk Road in efforts to expedite commercial prosperity – pursuant to addressing domestic deficiencies by encompassing physical and digital infrastructure to their framework.

Fundamentally, the Silk Road was a conduit of both material assets and intangible ideologies, from China's mainland westward into Europe. The Silk Road preponderated trade from the early second century BC until the mid fifteenth century AD. China inaugurated trade in the Han Dynasty before the Silk Road was ultimately terminated with the occlusion of west trade routes by the Ottoman Empire. The eclectic amalgamation of caravan trails, oases and mercantile points transversed across over six thousand four hundred kilometres from eastern China to the eastern Mediterranean. Furthermore, the lack of refined infrastructure in the pre-Revolutionary Era were epitomised by the surrogacy of river valleys and mountain passes in place of paved highways. Despite a sophisticated labyrinth of routes that composed the Silk Road, there prevailed a main overland path. This transit ran northwest from the Han capital Chang'an – the equivalent to modern day Xi'an – along the Hexi Corridor, inevitably severing into northern and southern passages. The northern passage struck through Central Asia to focal hubs in Samarkand and the Merve Oasis, passing through pivotal cities in Dunhuang, Turpan and Urumqi. Simultaneously, the southern passage traversed alongside the Taklamakan Desert into Afghanistan, transcurring the Hindu Kush mountain range and reunifying with the northern route near the Merve Oasis before continuing west. As routes departed from Central Asia, west passages ran through northern Iran and Mesopotamia of modern day Iraq. Routes skirted the Syrian Desert towards the Levant, consisting of modern day Syria, Israel, Palestine and Lebanon – coalescing to deliver Chinese exports to Mediterranean ships. Overland arteries forged the majority of the Silk Road, streamlining trade across provinces and cultures. Regardless of the magnitude of overland passages that composed the Silk Road, their maritime counterparts nonetheless elevated trade for China.

Oceanic routes bisected the continents substantively, transpiercing through the lands, yet also promulgated the assimilation of cultures that circumvented those territorial divides. The Maritime Silk Road flourished since the inception of the Silk Road trade, and affiliated the southern and eastern coasts of China with southeast Asia, the Indian subcontinent, eastern Africa, the Arabian Peninsula and the Mediterranean economically. Austronesian fleets sailed from Chinese ports located in Guangzhou through the South China Sea to south Asia. As a matter of course, the Maritime Silk Road was induced by Austronesian sailors from southeast Asia. Axiomatically, as a result, Austronesian vessels were predominant amongst contemporaries. Countless goods were transshipped at vital

ports, embodied by those in Malacca, Piraeus, Hambantota and Hamburg. However, an innumerable quantity of Asian powers participated. Preeminently, China actively pursued maritime routes for five centuries until the Silk Road's implosion. Additionally, Persian vessels also maintained power over the Arabian sea, where naval expeditions were launched - hastening the progress of semi-global trade. In one respect, due to the efficiency of the oceanic trade passages, the Maritime Silk Road gradually rivaled the overland Silk Road. Because of fundamental advantages highlighted by a lower cost, higher capacity system, it could be argued that these thalassic conduits were more optimised for transcontinental trade. Nevertheless, concerted efforts from maritime and overland trade actualised Eurasian exchange, notably in the overland transmission of maritime exports from China. This further intensified the process of the relay transport of trade goods, proving the complementarity in relations between the two networks.

Whilst such routes outlined the anatomy of the Silk Road, the pivotal nature of major cities including Dunhuang, Bukhara, Persepolis and Antioch that supplemented administrative centres could not be undermined. The provision of markets and caravanserais along with the proffering of protection highlighted the dependence of trade upon Eurasian cities. Trade itself, however, was cultivated by the selection of pack animals to shoulder trade goods over prolonged distances. Bactrian camels and horses predominantly ferried Chinese luxuries. Chinese sycorism was exalted by a plethora of prestigious commodities in silk textiles, spices, glassware and ceramics, pedagogical resources and sumptuous materials in precious stones, metals and ivory. Although the myriad of Chinese exclusivities, from porcelain, prized in Islamic and European markets, to paramount exports in rice and tea, resonated with foreign cultures, the allure to exogenous articles in China's mainland was not subverted. Synchronous to the export of Chinese lacquered ornaments, jade, lapis lazuli alike, with pomegranates and figs, debarked in China. In conjunction with the physical assets that circulated the Silk Road, intangible precepts also permeated the disposition of the Eurasian populace. From China, traditional philosophies of Confucianism and Daoism radiated towards Central Asian and European countries. Chinese practices in astronomy and medicine capitalised by Buddhist monasteries percolated European cultures whilst calligraphic writing systems infiltrated Eurocentric disciplinary approaches. Concurrently, unexampled religious conventions of Nestorian Christianity and Islamic principles indoctrinated the masses in China with foreign styles of architecture and agricultural techniques paving the way for Chinese advancement. Evidently, the Silk Road was an intricate system that harmonised collectively, optimising the harvest of provisions and expeditiously aggregate trade.

Due to its convoluted nature, there was a void of a singular purpose to the Silk Road. Instead, the Silk Road ministered to numerous diplomatic and military aims to each party involved. Pertaining to that of China, the Silk Road was wielded as an instrument of power and geographical hegemony that elevated such routes beyond the scope of mere trade. Firstly, in consolidation of military power, the Han dynasty sought the commencement of the Silk Road to abolish control of the Xiongnu confederation. The securing of the overland route along the Hexi Corridor built frontier garrisons with beacon towers that capacitated the Chinese military, extirpating nomadic threats to the government. By establishing their presence in oasis cities of Dunhuang, Turpan and Samarkand, Chinese dynasties facilitated tax trade and regulated the movement of such trade, allowing them to channel massive wealth into the state. Whilst many may argue the accumulated wealth was a byproduct of China's military aims, it was evident that economic prosperity was not adventitious. Moreover, orchestrations to fulfill objectives of diplomatic and tributary influence were formulated.

This was incontestably demonstrated in the usage of embassies and gifts extended towards Central Asian states to create a tributary relationship. As the Tang dynasty monopolised power in China, Turkic Khaganates from east to west were conquered, which transformed major regions of the Silk Road into a Chinese-regulated imperial highway. Thus, the Silk Road was pivotal to the achievement of the intentions of China. China was extremely successful in their endeavours of the elimination of political opposition and expansive military control. The mainland savoured a high degree of fruition as their objectives were met with no impediments.

Conversely, Eurocentric centres were confronted with significantly less triumphs. European powers situated in Venice and Genoa regarded the Silk Road as a direct portal to Asian luxuries. This was their primary objective – to dominate Asian markets and possess seamless access into China’s production. However, in the mid fifteenth century, the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople forced Europe to seek alternate maritime routes to southeastern Asia. Europe’s military and diplomatic projects were similar to China’s, but differed in their focal point of direction. China directed their control to preside over overland trade routes, yet European powers prioritised dictation over specific Asian markets through oceanic passages with initiatives to bypass external defenses. Hence, European powers undeniably attracted successes in the realm of breakthrough towards the new era. Notably, the commencement of the Age of Exploration established direct European connections that dominated maritime commerce. This fractionally attained the objectives of such European powers, as it sanctioned access into Asian goods. However, Europe did not level with the degree of success that China encountered, as the lack of control over Asian routes partially negated the economic prosperity of Europe. By resolving to maritime routes after ejection from overland passages, the incompetence of Europe’s external control was captured. Overall, Europe inchoately revelled in triumph. Whilst implications that stemmed from maritime dominance were certainly advantageous to Eurocentric ideals as well as global technological progress, it did not definitively address the nuanced objectives of European powers as it incompletely provided linear access into south and east Asian markets. In spite of these limitations, numerous Asian and European powers proved adept at effectuating their economic and militarian policies, underscoring the multifarious operability of the Silk Road.

The Silk Road was momentous towards the advancement of technology globally. Without these trade passages, crucial historical developments that were facilitated by the export of goods themselves would be prodigiously deferred. Distinguished kingdoms of the Han and Roman empires drew substantial wealth from trade. Profound territorial expansion both overland and navally would be significantly reduced for numerous regimes, whilst some would have been eradicated due to nomadic threats to their regional reign. Furthermore, cultures would not be merged, but rather isolated within their own nodes. Essentially, the spread of a vast variety of cultures and ideologies reshaped the intellectual capacities of Eurasia. In the circumstance of mutual isolation, there would have existed a catalyst that may have led to global crises due to discrepancies in beliefs. In the pre-modern era, it is contended that the Silk Road was incomparable in necessity as it augmented the celerity of globalisation. The Silk Road was the establishing foundation for succeeding patterns of pluricontinental exchange and economic interdependence that fostered global advancements in multiple aspects. For instance, the modern global economy, including digital exchanges, are owed towards the efforts of the Silk Road traders, who exhibited the profitability of syncretic commerce. Indisputably, the Silk Road introduced several benefits towards cities involved. In spite of the beneficial impact of such trade, it also distributed political detriments in the form of political vulnerability. As Silk Road trade diminished, cities that were highly dependent upon these exchanges suffered

tremendously. This economic dependency upon trade flows were not only vulnerable to political downfall, but also economic exploitation. The high tolls and trade taxes imposed by middlemen destroyed key points along the Silk Road. As trade progressed, biological ramifications surfaced, and a series of ecological deficiencies ultimately atrophied the Silk Road, eliding the enormous success enjoyed by traders at the height of trade.

Undeterred by the prosperity that the Silk Road relished, the succession of a multitude of conflicts fostered its collapse. As a consequence of a series of biological determinants, political disintegration and religious discordance, the Silk Road was consigned to desuetude. Primarily, the confluence of biological crises enervated the Silk Road. Notably, the Black Death was propagated by merchants across Central Asia that travelled along Silk Road routes throughout Eurasia in the mid fourteenth century. Consequently, as bubonic plague infections surged, the Silk Road was severely weakened in several aspects. In particular, the pandemic that diseased the countless concurrently corrupted the same populations that sustained the Silk Road. This culminated in the vast destruction of urban economies that debilitated political stability. Thus, it was conspicuous that this specific factor, regarding the Eurasian plague, redounded to a sequence of calamitous demises for the vitality of the Silk Road. More so, the biological aspect that extended to the rapid climate change further advanced the degradation of Eurasian trade routes. As passages thrived upon desert oases bolstered by glacial meltwater from mountain ranges, the disintegration of glaciers directly resulted in the drying of critical oases with numerous routes closed due to their lack of functionality. Not only were various trade routes physically dilapidated, the demographic collapse due to disease entailed the drastic decrease in luxuries. Incontinently, European inhabitants who laboured under natural dilemmas had no further requirements for Chinese opulence. The perseverance to survive superseded the covetousness to hedonism. In spite of elementary issues that concerned the environment, the Silk Road underwent major physical and intangible abatements that lessened trade foundations and deformed terrestrial citadels that ultimately induced the collapse of the Silk Road.

Extending beyond ecological pressures that plagued the Silk Road, political fractures also aggravated declines. The fragmentation into rival khanates that followed the Mongol Empire's attempts to revive the Silk Road merely minimised political unity that annexed the trade routes. This was further escalated by the destruction of critical cities along passages by Turko-Mongol conqueror Tamerlane with intentions to substitute the objectives of the Silk Road by reinforcing economic warfare in place of peaceful unity. Furthermore, Muslim powers that arose from the Ottoman seizure of Constantinople in 1453 governed the western routes of the Silk Road. Charging high taxes on Chinese exports directly depreciated the European demand for such goods. The accretion of overland trade pricing waned the appeal of East Asian productions. Trade suffered significantly. Additionally, another disparate factor in the Silk Road's pullulation was a high degree of religious concord. Numerous systems characterised by Christian, Buddhist, Muslim and Zoroastrian beliefs existed in unanimity. Hence, as the gradual persecution of Buddhism – the destruction of west temples and monasteries – incurred and the Islamic doctrines spread, the integrity of the Silk Road was erased. As monasteries that meditated as cultural centres were desolated, tolerance to different theologies was ineluctably extirpated. Notwithstanding the fruitful trades conducted along the Silk Road, a construct of catalysts yielded the demise of such trade passages. However, although the legends of the Silk Road have long ago been annalised into the expositions of history, initiatives administrated by China intend to orchestrate the revival of the Silk Road advantageously for the Chinese economy.

In the current milieu, China is diligently reviving the ancient Silk Road that targets deficiencies in the modern Chinese economy. Through the Belt and Road Initiative launched in 2013, China strategically utilises physical and digital frameworks to modernise previous overland and maritime routes that dominated Eurasian trade in the Late Antiquity and Middle Ages. Critical modern developments are outlined by the Silk Road Economic Belt that encompasses overland routes penetrating through Xi'an to Central Asia, before striking into Europe. This initiative analogously comprises the twenty first century Maritime Silk Road, spanning from southeast Asian ports to Africa. China aspires to expand markets and integrate mainland provinces with hopes to increase economic prosperity. Aggrandised geopolitical influence, particularly in Eurasia, serves promising expectancies to China that will affirm their objectives of the Belt and Road Initiative - to proliferate financial development. Digitally, 5G, underwater cables and surveillance systems compose e-commerce platforms that bolster the Chinese economy, all whilst being complemented by physical routes. Despite these auspicious benefits, the revival of the Silk Road may bring forth unintended consequences. For instance, environmental devastation formed by the dependency upon fossil fuels may result in noticeable climate change. Pollution may become a crisis within China, with air pollution lowering the average life expectancy in numerous neighbouring countries. Moreover, there is a preponderant financial burden placed on China under the assumption they undergo this economic change. This may incite unsustainable debt on China that may exact years to recover from. However, considering both the benefits and drawbacks that root the orchestrations of the revival of the Silk Road, the positives largely override the negative, potential risks that China may suffer from. Wontedly, the risks that emerge alongside every program are magnified due to concerns of the public.

The ancient Silk Road was not merely a matrix of trade passages, but an aggregation of tales that manifest the chronicles of primordial history. During its multacentennial reign over Eurasian trade, an incomprehensible multitude of Asian producers and European powers emerged from the shadows to coalesce into a thriving global economy. Despite its deplorable collapse before the Early Modern Age, the legacy of the Silk Road remains ingrained inextricably in Chinese soil and water, reconstituted into a hybridised cyber-physical construct that persists in the expedition of trade, globally. Regardless of vicissitudes that linger, the Silk Road continues to mediate cultural and intellectual exchange internationally.

The Journey from the Silk Road

ESF Renaissance College, Marco So – 16

China is one of the world's oldest civilizations, dating back to around 2070 BCE. A nation doesn't last that long in this dog-eat-dog world without developing strong systems of governance, culture, and trade. The resilience of China is characterised by its ability to adapt, innovate and engage with nations beyond its vast borders. Throughout millennia, China has faced numerous challenges; from invasions and political changes to global prejudice and economic disasters. From each challenge, China has managed to maintain its core traditional values while leaving room for innovation and adaptation. The formation of The Silk Road acts as a catalyst for China's ability to leverage cultural heritage and resources, facilitating change that have shaped not only its history, but the wider world's.

The Silk Road was an ancient network of trade routes that connected Asia with the West. The creation of the Silk Road was a gradual process that unfolded over several centuries. Before the formal establishment of the Silk Road, early trade between different communities in China and other nations in Central Asia was conducted through rudimentary paths. These paths gradually developed as distinct trade routes, first starting off facilitating the trade of goods such as jade, pottery, livestock, and silk. The Silk Road formally developed during the Han Dynasty, around the 2nd century BCE, the Silk Road emerged as a set of trade routes linking China with Central Asia and the Mediterranean. According to Britannica, The Han Dynasty's emperor, Emperor Wudi, played a pivotal role in the development of the Silk Road, by dispatching envoy Zhang Qian to establish diplomatic relations with neighboring nations. This strategy not only opened up an array of trade routes, but also allowed for unified cultural exchanges.

The Silk Road served several purposes; it enabled the trade of luxury goods such as silk, spices, and precious metals and stones, which were highly sought after in the western markets. Beyond the aforementioned commodities, the Silk Road functioned as a hub for the spread of ideas, religions, culture, and technology advancements. For instance, Buddhism made its way from India to China via these routes, profoundly influencing Chinese culture and philosophy. From an economic standpoint, it allowed for farmers, miners, and merchants to finally have a stable hub to sell the prized goods from their culture in a voluntary exchange. For example, Persia played a significant role in exporting distinct and unique foods such as dates, saffron powder and pistachios. This small cultural exchange blossomed into a long-lasting cultural relationship between the Middle East and China. These interactions among these diverse cultures fostered a mutual respect and enriched societies, laying the foundation for future global trade networks.

One of the most famous travelers along the Silk Road was Marco Polo. His journey in the 13th century introduced the wonders of the East to the attention of Europe, Marco Polo extensively travelled through China, where he spent nearly two decades in the court of Kublai Khan (Imperial court of the Yuan dynasty). In this time he undertook missions across China, experiencing different cultures, inventions and foods that were unknown to Europe at the time. When Marco Polo returned back to Europe, his detailed accounts of "The Travels of Marco Polo" dazzled Europeans and shaped their perceptions of Asia for millennia.

“The Travels of Marco Polo” detailed his 24-year journey across Asia and his extraordinary experiences at the court of Kublai Khan. The book quickly became a spectacle around the world, with translated hand-copied manuscripts circulating widely across Europe. Marco Polo’s vivid and non-judgemental descriptions allowed Europeans to understand the wider world and challenged prejudiced misconceptions rooted from Western viewpoints. The account acted as a travel guide and a sourcebook for merchants, inspiring notable explorers. Notably, Christopher Columbus owned a copy himself and drew inspiration from his own expeditions. In totality, Marco Polo was a cornerstone of putting the Silk Road on the global map, he allowed for the Silk Road to be an international center for exchanging culture between foreign nations.

Fast forward a mere 14 centuries, the Belt and Road Initiative was born. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), also known as the “Modern Silk Road” was announced in 2013 by Xi Jinping as a deliberate strategy to reconstruct a “modernised” version of the ancient Silk Road. Through a network of land and maritime trade routes running through more than 140 participating countries, its primary function is to boost global interdependence by investing in infrastructure such as roads, railways, train stations, and ports across Asia, Europe, Africa, and beyond. The BRI also aims to facilitate smoother trade operations and encourage a flow of goods, services, and technology between foreign nations. From an economic frame of mind, the BRI has completely transformed many neighboring and partnering countries by enabling them to invest in large-scale projects, increasing export opportunities, and supporting local industries, therefore leading to both local and global economic growth. From a political viewpoint, it has strengthened China’s influence on diplomatic affairs while generating new forms of international collaboration and interdependence among nations, as they become linked through incentivised economic trade. Evidently, this is in China’s favour, as it positions the country as a central hub in global trade dynamics. By establishing strategic

partnerships and playing that middle-man role, China not only enhances its geopolitical power and economic leverage, but also upholds their external sovereignty among threats on its path to becoming a global superpower.

All global powerhouses worldwide are backed up by neighboring countries in at least one way or another. Whether a country is backed up economically, socially, or diplomatically, international relations and interdependence are paramount to a country’s path to being a superpower. In my opinion, China’s framework of diplomacy is rooted in the Belt and Road Initiative by leveraging their financial assets to establish a “friendly” presence in Asian and Mediterranean countries. To fully understand and assess China’s current position as a global superpower, we must understand that the China the world knows today would likely look very different without the Belt and Road initiative. Through the BRI, China has extended its influence beyond its borders by investing in different countries, and this global initiative not only reinforces China’s status within Asia but also in regions spanning from Africa to Europe. This modern revival of the Silk Road proves as a testament to the importance of laying the foundation to global interconnectedness in trade around the world. The Silk Road laid the groundwork for the BRI’s success by demonstrating the power in connectivity and exchange, shaping China’s long standing understanding of global interdependence and soft power. In many ways, I believe the Silk Road will remain a cornerstone of China’s modern success, serving as the historical foundation that continues to shape its pursuit of global influence through the Belt and Road Initiative.

In China, diplomatic relations have always been a rocky subject to touch on. However, the Belt and Road Initiative has allowed China's diplomacy to skyrocket. Through the BRI, China has signed cooperation agreements with more than 140 countries and 30 international organisations to promote large-scale long term partnerships. China achieves

these long lasting alliances through working on projects under the BRI. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, which connects Western China to the Arabian Seas via highways and energy pipelines, and major port development projects in Greece, Sri Lanka, and Kenya. In Central Asia, new railways between China and Kazakhstan have enhanced land-based trade, while European connections such as the Budapest-Belgrade railway aim to improve transportation between the East and West. As the BRI enters its teenage years, it continues to reshape global trade and generate economic and political interdependence at an international scale.

From my interpretation, the Belt and Road Initiative is China's multifaceted approach in improving their international relations, and ultimately holding leverage amongst its economic partners. Through large-scale infrastructure and the investment of over 1.3 trillion USD, China positions itself as an indispensable partner whilst simultaneously creating long-term financial and political relationships. This sets China up with soft power in the form of agenda setting influence, access to critical infrastructure, and the ability to nudge partner states to support Chinese positions in international forums and treaties without using direct coercion. For example, one of China's biggest economic partners through the BRI is Africa, and China has financially aided Africa in several large-scale projects such as Kenya's Mombasa-Nairobi Standard Gauge Railway and industrial parks in Ethiopia. In return, many African states have backed China in international forums, for example supporting Beijing's positions on Hong Kong and Xinjiang at the UN through General Assembly voting processes. However, this diplomacy can be interpreted as manipulative or with ill intent because the asymmetry of power often leaves smaller, indebted countries with limited policy autonomy. An infamous example of this is Sri Lanka's Hambantota Port, where the Sri Lankan government faced difficulties in repaying Chinese loans tied to the project. In 2017, the Sri Lankan government agreed to lease the port and surrounding land to a Chinese state-owned company for 99 years. Moreover, critics argue that the fear of losing Chinese financing or market access can pressure governments worldwide to comply and align with China's stance on issues like Taiwan, human right votes at the UN, or security partnerships. At the same time, studies show that while BRI loans do not always amount to deliberate "debt traps", they clearly enhance China's strategic reach and embed a Chinese presence deep into the global economy.

The Belt and Road Initiative formally brands itself as a formal continuation of the ancient Silk Road, leveraging the historical and cultural idea of the Silk Road. This, coupled with the emphasis on globalisation creates a powerful narrative of connectivity and shared prosperity around the world. However, the BRI represents a centralised, strategic, and expansive project led by the Chinese state, which is severely unlike the loosely connected caravan routes of antiquity from the ancient Silk Road. The BRI encompasses an umbrella of infrastructure development, policy coordination, financial integration and diplomatic engagement across more than 140 countries. The Silk Road was an authentic and raw representation of how bringing various cultures and religions together could create a product of globalisation that brought millions of people together. The BRI is a branding umbrella to project China's influence on a global scale, helping China present itself as a benevolent great power fostering global development.

Thus, the BRI is ultimately a modern state-led initiative far more politically and economically complex than its ancient predecessor.

The journey from the legendary ancient Silk Road to the modern Belt and Road Initiative embodies the profound saying “It’s about the journey, not the destination.” This journey is a reflection of China’s perseverance in fostering economic, diplomatic, and cultural bonds that will survive through the test of time. While the Silk Road was a magical tapestry of merchants, connectivity, and religions weaving through and through as a unified civilisation, the Belt and Road Initiative is a deliberate journey toward shared development and peace across the 7 continents. The significance lies not merely in the destination reached, but in the ongoing enduring process of collaboration, mutual understanding, and growth that will shape the future of globalization.

Buddhism: A Spiritual Enlightenment in the Middle Kingdom

International Christian School, Wong Hei Long Marcus – 16

The Silk Road is one of the most influential networks of exchange in Chinese history. It facilitated the trade of silk, spices, and other valuable commodities, but more importantly, it enabled cultural diffusion between China, Europe, and the Islamic world. From Constantinople to Chang'an, travelers carried not only material goods but also new ideas, artistic styles, and belief systems. China would develop into one of the world's wealthiest and most cosmopolitan societies of the time due to its pivotal role in the Silk Road. Yet, China's most transformative import was not gold, glass, or gems, but Buddhism, a spiritual and philosophical system that reshaped Chinese thought, art, and society for centuries to come.

Buddhism originated in the kingdom of Magadha in northern India during the fifth century BCE, emerging as a path toward liberation from suffering through mindfulness, moral living, and wisdom. In Chinese records, India and its surrounding regions were collectively known as “the Western Regions,” an area enveloped in mystery and perceived as distant and exotic to early Chinese observers. However, as China's own territorial reach expanded westward, that distance began to shrink. The Silk Road began during the Han dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE), when Chinese envoys and traders ventured along the Gansu Corridor and through the Tarim Basin, connecting the Han Empire with Central Asia and establishing enduring contact with the peoples of Inner Asia. This marked the beginning of sustained east–west interaction that would forever alter China's cultural landscape.

Simultaneously, Indian culture was pushing northward, and it was through these same Central Asian corridors that Buddhism made its first journey east. The oasis kingdoms of Kucha, Khotan, and Turfan became cultural crossroads where Buddhist monks preached, translated, and debated, turning caravan stops into vibrant centers of religious life. Local peoples such as the Sogdians played crucial intermediary roles in this process. They did not merely transport goods; they translated sutras, painted murals, and funded monasteries that blended Greco-Indian and Chinese styles. In these liminal spaces, hybrid cultures emerged that embodied the essence of the Silk Road: connections that were commercial, intellectual, and spiritual all at once.

The Kushan Empire served as a vital link between India and China during the first three centuries CE. Ruling a vast area stretching from northern India into Central Asia, the Kushans embraced Buddhism as a state-supported religion under King Kanishka. Their patronage manifested through the construction of monasteries, the sponsorship of missions, and the promotion of a spectacular artistic tradition in Gandhara, which was a fusion of Hellenistic realism and Indian spirituality. The serene, humanlike depictions of the Buddha that emerged from Gandhara, with flowing robes and naturalistic features, would deeply influence Chinese representations of divinity for centuries. At the same time, the Han dynasty under Emperor Wu was expanding into the western frontiers to counter the nomadic Xiongnu. This convergence of power and ambition created a corridor for cultural contact, and an intercontinental dialogue between states with overlapping strategic and economic interests.

Buddhist emissaries, merchants, and missionaries began to traverse this corridor with increasing frequency. Among these travelers was An Shigao, a Parthian monk who reached the Han capital of Luoyang around 148 CE and is recognized as one of the first translators of Buddhist scripture into Chinese. His efforts introduced foundational concepts such as karma, nirvana, and the Four Noble Truths to a Chinese audience, offering a new framework for understanding suffering and ethical conduct. What made these early transmissions remarkable was their adaptation to local sensibilities. Translators did not merely transfer language; they reinterpreted the foreign within familiar frameworks, often using Daoist terminology to explain Buddhist ideas and thereby making them comprehensible to Chinese elites. These creative strategies allowed Buddhism to take root in Chinese soil, preparing the ground for its later flourishing.

During the Han dynasty, Buddhism was mainly practiced by foreign communities and a limited number of curious elites. Confucianism, with its emphasis on hierarchy, filial piety, and ritual propriety, continued to dominate the Han court, and most Chinese viewed Buddhism as an exotic cult from the West. However, the disintegration of the Han in the third century and the subsequent Three Kingdoms era brought decades of warfare, fragmentation, and social upheaval. The collapse of the Confucian order created a vacuum of peace and stability, as institutions that had once guaranteed stability now seemed unable to prevent chaos. Amidst such uncertainty, many turned to alternative sources of moral and spiritual guidance, and Buddhism offered such an answer.

Buddhism, with its doctrines of compassion, karma, and enlightenment, provided cosmological and ethical clarity to a population weary of suffering. Its teachings on impermanence aligned with the lived realities of war and displacement, while its promises of rebirth and personal salvation resonated deeply with ordinary people confronting loss. Monasteries spread across war-torn regions, providing more than spiritual solace; they offered food, shelter, and education to the displaced, functioning as both religious and social welfare institutions. In this way, Buddhist communities met both social and psychological needs, establishing themselves as stabilizing forces in a fractured world. As local rulers across China competed for legitimacy, patronage of Buddhist monasteries became a way to signal benevolence and moral authority, further embedding the religion into Chinese political culture.

As Buddhism gained ground, the need for consistent translation and interpretation became of particular importance. The monk Kumarajiva, who arrived in China in 401 CE, became a defining figure in this process. A translator of exceptional linguistic and philosophical skill, Kumarajiva supervised teams in Chang'an that rendered Sanskrit sutras into elegant and accessible Chinese prose. His translations, including key texts such as the Lotus Sutra and the Diamond Sutra, were praised not only for doctrinal clarity but also for their literary quality, helping Buddhist texts appeal to both scholars and commoners. This movement did more than spread doctrine; it elevated Chinese scholarship and linguistics by forcing intellectuals to invent new terminology and refine existing concepts to express complex metaphysical ideas.

Kumarajiva's work catalyzed a broader process of sinicization in which Chinese thinkers began to interpret Buddhist teachings through their own cultural ideals. Confucianism's focus on ethical relationships and Daoism's concern with naturalness and non-action were woven into Buddhist discussions of compassion, emptiness, and enlightenment. Over time, Chinese Buddhists would emphasize harmony, moral cultivation, and inner peace, aligning the path to awakening with longstanding Chinese ideals of self-cultivation and social order. Monks reinterpreted reincarnation within the context of filial piety, encouraging good deeds for the sake of both ancestors and descendants, and integrated Chinese ancestor worship into Buddhist

ceremonies. This gradual integration of values and practices would see Buddhism evolve from a foreign import into a vibrant and distinctly Chinese religious identity.

When China was reunified under the Sui dynasty (581–618 CE), Buddhism was essential for political legitimacy and cultural integration. Emperor Wen of Sui viewed religion as a moral force capable of binding the empire together after centuries of disunity. He patronized temples and integrated Buddhist rituals into state ceremonies, presenting Sui rule as divinely sanctioned and compassionate. Monasteries gained official recognition, becoming powerful institutions that participated in the economy and governance through social welfare programs, such as managing grain stores during famine and providing education to local communities. In doing so, they reinforced the idea that a just state was one that cared for its people, in harmony with Buddhist ideals of compassion.

The Sui Dynasty also witnessed the rise of the Tiantai Buddhist school, founded by the monk Zhiyi. Zhiyi sought to organize the vast and often bewildering corpus of Buddhist scriptures into a coherent and accessible philosophical system. He believed that enlightenment was attainable by anyone through disciplined meditation and virtuous living, a vision that resonated strongly with Chinese cultural values regarding moral self-cultivation. Tiantai thought centered on the “Threefold Truth”, which were emptiness, conventional existence, and the middle, which together articulated a nuanced understanding of reality that balanced absolute and relative perspectives. Zhiyi’s doctrine of the “Perfect Teaching” (Yuanjiao) proposed that all phenomena, however ordinary, could be seen as expressions of ultimate truth, unifying what had seemed fragmented into a single, integrated vision.

Zhiyi’s efforts not only provided a uniquely Chinese synthesis of doctrine and practice but also exerted deep influence on later East Asian schools, including Pure Land and Zen Buddhism. By emphasizing both meditation and wisdom as inseparable paths to awakening, Tiantai provided a model that bridged contemplative practice and doctrinal study. This balance paralleled the Sui state’s own desire for unity: different regions, dialects, and customs were to form one empire, just as different teachings and practices were to form one path. Buddhism thus reinforced political ideals of harmony and centralization while offering individuals a meaningful spiritual path.

Buddhism’s integration into China reached full consolidation under the succeeding Tang dynasty (618–907 CE), which is often regarded as the golden age of Buddhism in China. With centralized rule and flourishing trade, the Tang court embraced cosmopolitanism, and Buddhism thrived under imperial oversight. The Tang regarded religion not only as a moral authority but also as a symbol of cultural sophistication and international connection, especially as Chang’an grew into a metropolis of around one million inhabitants. In this environment, Buddhist monasteries, foreign merchants, and embassies from distant lands interacted daily, making tangible the Silk Road’s role as a bridge between civilizations.

Buddhist art during the Tang reached unprecedented heights, visually demonstrating the synthesis of foreign and native elements. The stone carvings at the Longmen Grottoes and the murals at Dunhuang depict paradisiacal scenes of Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, and celestial musicians, blending Indian spiritual iconography with Chinese artistic sensibilities in line, color, and composition. The Leshan Giant Buddha in Sichuan, begun in 713 CE by the monk Haitong, remains one of the most remarkable testaments to the era’s faith and creativity, carved directly into cliffs overlooking river confluences to protect travelers and symbolize divine guardianship. To this day, these monuments reveal how Buddhism, transmitted along the Silk Road, became embedded in the physical landscape of China as a permanent reminder of spiritual aspiration.

Buddhism under the Tang also became a powerful intellectual and literary influence. Poets such as Li Bai, Wang Wei, and Bai Juyi drew on Buddhist themes of impermanence, detachment, and spiritual awakening, using nature imagery to suggest deeper truths about the fleetingness of life and the possibility of inner freedom. Tang painters also captured Bodhisattvas and meditative landscapes with subtle elegance, inviting viewers to contemplate nature's harmony as a reflection of the mind's ideal state. This also resonated with Daoist elements in Chinese culture, as both traditions valued spontaneity, tranquility, and alignment with the cosmos. Through such artistic expressions, Buddhism contributed to a creative synthesis in which China's past and present religious currents converged.

The Silk Road was not only used for commerce but also for pilgrimage. Monks journeyed to India in search of authentic scriptures and deeper insight into the Buddha's teachings, turning trade routes into paths of devotion. One of the earliest was Faxian, who traveled in the early fifth century to the Gupta Empire in India. His work, the *Record of Buddhist Kingdoms*, documented his experiences and offered valuable firsthand observations of monasteries, rituals, and regional variations in Buddhist practice, revealing the extent and complexity of religious networks stretching across Asia. His account also highlighted the differences between Indian and Chinese interpretations, encouraging further reflection and adaptation.

Two centuries later, another monk, Xuanzang, embarked on an extraordinary seventeen-year expedition to reach the monastic university of Nalanda and other key Buddhist sites. His journey was filled with danger and discovery, including traversing deserts, crossing mountain ranges, and negotiating with foreign courts. Upon his celebrated return, Xuanzang brought back hundreds of manuscripts and relics, and he dedicated years to translating these texts into Chinese, greatly enriching Buddhist scholarship in East Asia. His translations helped standardize many doctrines and technical terms, ensuring a more coherent and accurate understanding of Buddhist philosophy.

Xuanzang's life and travels later inspired Wu Cheng'en's sixteenth-century novel *Journey to the West*, a masterpiece that transformed historical pilgrimage into an allegorical quest for enlightenment. In this tale, the monk Tripitaka, or Tang Sanzang modeled on Xuanzang, travels with mythical companions such as Sun Wukong and Zhu Bajie, each representing different aspects of human nature. *Journey to the West's* enduring popularity underscores how deeply Buddhism had imbued Chinese culture, not only as a faith but as a rich reservoir of symbols, narratives, and moral ideals. *Journey to the West* illustrates how Buddhism was no longer merely imported doctrine; it had become raw material for Chinese creativity, shaping theatre, storytelling, and popular religious imagination even to this day.

Despite its prosperity under the Tang, Buddhism eventually faced political backlash. Some Chinese rulers grew wary of the immense wealth, landholdings, and social autonomy of monasteries, fearing that these institutions diverted resources and loyalty away from the state. The most severe persecution came in 845 CE under Emperor Wuzong, a devout Daoist, who seized temple lands, destroyed thousands of monasteries, and forced large numbers of monks and nuns to return to lay life. This crackdown severely weakened Buddhism's institutional presence and marked the end of its golden age as a dominant public force.

Yet the spirit of Buddhism survived, with it being deeply rooted in philosophy, art, and daily practice. Over the succeeding centuries, Buddhist ideas merged with Confucian and Daoist thought, helping to shape Neo-Confucianism in the Song dynasty and enriching China's moral and intellectual traditions. Zen Buddhism, with its emphasis on direct experience and meditation, influenced scholars who sought a synthesis between rational ethics and inner illumination. Even as state sponsorship fluctuated with the dynastic cycle, Buddhist

rituals persisted at the popular level in funerals, festivals, and temple fairs, demonstrating that the religion had become intertwined with the rhythms of Chinese life.

However, the rise of maritime trade in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries would redirect economic exchanges away from the old caravan routes across Central Asia. The Silk Road declined in relative importance as sea routes connecting China with Southeast Asia, India, and beyond took precedence. However, the cultural legacies fostered by the Silk Road in China remained resilient. Buddhism's values of compassion, moral restraint, and the pursuit of inner stillness had become interwoven with Chinese ethics and artistic expression over many centuries. Temples, sculptures, and paintings continued to keep these ideals alive, transforming them into enduring cultural treasures visited, venerated, and reinterpreted by each new generation.

Ultimately, the Silk Road's true significance for China lay not just in economic trade but in the power of cultural exchange. While merchants carried silk and porcelain across deserts and mountains, monks carried ideas, rituals, and scriptures that reshaped the entire course of Chinese history. Buddhism's journey to the Middle Kingdom illustrates how faith and knowledge can transcend borders, languages, and empires, creating shared intellectual and spiritual worlds across vast distances. Buddhism played a multifaceted role in China, serving as a religion, a moral code, a source of artistic inspiration, and a tool of legitimacy for ruling governments.

Buddhism's spread into China through the Silk Road reminds us that the greatest legacies of long-distance exchange are rarely material. The Silk Road stands as a testament to humanity's shared quest for meaning, a reminder that the richest treasures are those of the mind and spirit. Through Buddhism's role in shaping Chinese society from philosophy and politics to poetry and pilgrimage, we can glimpse one of history's most profound cultural syntheses, a synthesis that continues to influence art, ethics, and thought across the world today.

Creative Writing
Non-Fiction

Group 5



How the Silk Road Formed an Ancient Economic System

HD Beijing School, Regina Zhao – 16

When people are talking about the ancient Silk Road, they may think of those sparkling silks, rare jewels, delicate porcelain, or those caravans that have traveled through this long history road. However, the Silk Road was much more than just a trade route; it was also the fundamental artery of the world's first interconnected economic system, a magnificent bond connected Eastern and Western culture, economies, and ideology.

The story of the Silk Road can be traced back to around 130 BCE. Although trade routes had existed in Central Asia for thousands of years, the official opening of this route is attributed to a man called Zhang Qian, an envoy of the Western Han Dynasty. His initial mission to the Western region was to seek for alliances against the northern nomadic tribes. However, the intelligence he brought back became an invaluable asset to the ancient Chinese economy: There was a high demand for Chinese products, especially silk, from the Western region society. This information has provided a catalyst for the expansion of the economy and has become the cornerstone of long-term economic growth. As people realized the economic potential of this chance, they began to consolidate the Hexi Corridor and decided to establish a government in the Tarim Basin, in order to maintain the semblance of peace. By pacifying threats and building up strongholds, the Han Dynasty provided necessary security to the caravans traveling across the Taklamakan Desert and Pamir Plateau. They started from Changan, which is now named Xian, travelled all the way to the port in the Mediterranean and the Ganges Plain in India. From then on, a vast network included both land and sea routes appears, people trade goods and technology, talk about thoughts and the future. Later on, they decided to name it the Silk Road.

The establishment of the safe trade route first directly stimulated the handicraft industry. Workshops and craftsmen were no longer concerned only with the local preferences and tastes but began to expand their business to meet the wants of more international customers. This led to an increase in specialized production, which is known as producing specific product. With the development of handicrafts, the silk industry, which was a state secret before, has achieved a unprecedentedly prosperity. In ancient China, these silk fabrics were not just ordinary products but played the role of strategic goods and hard currency, just like gold in modern society. The court used silk as a reward to vassals, pay the military salaries, and even used it to exchange horses from nomadic tribes. As it became a product for trading goods on the Silk Road, merchants such as Sogdians in Central Asia acted as intermediaries, exchanging gold, silver, currency and other products for silk, then resold it to Persia and Rome at a significantly higher price. In Rome, these slim and graceful silk products, regarded as the 'second skin', caused a huge social sensation. During that time, the price of silk was even higher than gold, and has become the symbol of wealth and status. As this trade chain growth up, the technology of breeding silkworm and other skills continues to disseminate, upgrading the local industries and creating new production technology.

The economic impact of the Silk Road was multifaceted. China exports lots of luxury goods with high value. Silk was one of the stars, but there are also other products, such as porcelain, cinnamon, and ginger, as well as the technology of paper. In return, Western countries have also provided a variety of products, especially in agricultural sector. Grapes, pomegranates, walnuts, sesame, and were first introduced to the Central Plains. They also export their own luxury goods, such as cotton fabrics and ivory from India, strong Central Asian horses, and glassware, which best symbolized the wealth of Roman. In addition, the Silk Road also provided opportunities to exchange services and knowledge. The caravans themselves were a small economy; they required security, translation, and most importantly, a trader. It operates as any other economy, showcasing the changes and evolutions, as well as the essence of a profit-driven society.

Moreover, the complexity of trade in the Silk Road have derived huge demand for a reliable medium of exchange. During that time, the ‘Wu Zhu’ coin from Han Dynasty became widely accepted and it became the standard currency in the eastern section of the Silk Road, greatly simplifying the complicated transactions through the long distance of Silk Road. However, there were still inherent risks to transport large sums of currency across thousands of miles. To solve this problem, merchants developed the first forms of credit and bills of exchange. In China, new police called ‘fly money’ system has been published. This system allows merchants to save their coins at the official office of each city and obtain a paper voucher that could be exchanged into money in another city, which effectively reduce the risk of thefts. Furthermore, it simplified the flow of money in the market and that paper voucher has become the earliest state supported bill of exchange system. However, perhaps the most unique currency was the use of silk itself as a type of trading tools. Mostly due to the inherent value of natural silk and its widely spread popularity, silk has become a highly acceptable physical currency. They had been used in many large transactions and as tribute between countries, crossed language and cultural barrier, serving as a stable store of value and accounting unit.

The economic system of the Silk Road has astonishing resilience, and its fluctuations gave birth to new trade patterns. When the land-based Silk Road was obstructed by political turmoil such as the Lushan Rebellion and the fall of the Sassanid Empire, the Maritime Silk Road quickly arose. The prosperity of Guangzhou in the Tang Dynasty, Quanzhou in the Song Dynasty, and Citong Port in the Yuan Dynasty are all proof of this change. The commodity composition also changed according to this. Porcelain, due to its maritime resistance, slowly became the main export product together with silk. The complementarity of land and sea and commodity iteration had enabled the Silk Road economic system to last for thousands of years.

Cross cultural trade inevitably leads to arguments. As time goes by, a unique dispute resolution mechanism had developed along the Silk Road. In the Dunhuang Turpan documents, there was contract documents recorded that disputes should be handled based on the local customs. Samarkand has an international arbitration court, with a team of experienced merchants from different nations. What was even more remarkable was the ‘credit blacklist’ system: there were public display boards in places such as West City in Chang an and Baghdad Smart Palace which record the merchants with dishonest behavior. This mechanism directly affects the reputation of merchants, successfully restricted commercial behavior.

Apart from the formal trading market, there was also an active market for prohibited goods outside of legal trade. China had long strictly banned the outflow of silkworm eggs, but according to the 'Records of the Western Regions of the Great Tang Dynasty', Qu Sadana Kingdom, which is now Hotan, successfully introduced silkworm eggs to western by hiding them in their head-dress. Military technologies such as crossbow making and steel-making have also been transferred to the West through private channels. The purple dyeing technology which was strictly kept confidential by Persia and the silk repair techniques owned by Byzantium had become the targets of smuggling. These black-market transactions have extremely high profit margins, but also along with huge risks. The emergence of professional smuggling gangs and complex methods to passing through security checks formed an 'underground economic system' under the shadow of the Silk Road.

Behind the glorious trade lies the ecological cost. In order to supply fuel for the camel caravan, the *Populus euphratica* forests around the oases on the north-south Silk Road were extensively cut down; In order to meet the demand of the East for ivory, rhino horn, and musk, wild animals along the route are overhunted; The expansion of irrigated agriculture has led to the abandonment of ancient cities such as Loulan in the lower reaches of the Tarim River. After the 8th century, desertification intensified in some parts of Central Asia, coinciding with the peak of trade, demonstrating the profound impact of early globalization on the ecological environment. This unsustainable development model has become the underlying reason for the eventual decline of certain road sections.

The Silk Road was the first great practice in human history to build a cross-continental economic system. It went beyond simple commodity exchange, weaving technology, institutions, finance and knowledge into an interdependent network. This road not only witnessed the circulation of silk and porcelain but also gave birth to credit tools and commercial rules, promoted the spread of technology and the integration of beliefs, demonstrating an astonishing balance of wisdom between prosperity and crisis, openness and protection, development costs and system resilience. It proves that different civilizations can achieve common evolution through economic ties. This systematic interaction across geographical and cultural boundaries laid the oldest paradigm for subsequent globalization attempts. When we talk about the interconnected world today, we are still walking on the extension line depicted by the Silk Road.

From Silk to Synergy

Pui Ching Middle School (Macau), Chang Lai Him – 17

While the dust has long since settled on the ancient paths where camel caravans once carried silk and spices, the spirit of the Silk Road has found a new, high-speed heartbeat. Over 2,000 years ago, there was a route that connected the East and West—the Silk Road. It includes two main routes, one on land and one at sea. The Silk Road begins in Chang’an (now Xi’an), extending eastward to Luoyang, via Central and Western Asia, and reaching the Mediterranean Sea to the West. Meanwhile, the Oversea Silk Road originated from the coasts of China, traversing the Indian Ocean, and reaching Africa. Named after the silk trade, it played a central role in facilitating economic, cultural, political, and religious interactions. 2,000 years later, in 2013, China initiated the “New Belt Road” – The Belt and Road Initiative, reviving the Silk Road from the history books.

The primary commodities traded via the Silk Road are diverse, including silk, textiles, spices, food, tools, woodworking, hardware supplies, artworks, and more. Besides goods, the Silk Road also catalysed cultural exchange among the countries along the route.

“The Belt and Road Initiative” is, in various aspects, similar to the Silk Road. They both promote international trading and cultural integration. On the other hand, there are aspects in which the two diverge. Now, railways, roads, and aviation all replaced horses and camels, significantly improving capacity, efficiency, and safety. In the wake of the flow of goods and people, driving the development of infrastructure, the economy is developing expeditiously, steadily, and positively. The “Five Connections” policy: Policy Coordination, Facilities Connectivity, Unimpeded Trade, Financial Integration, and People-to-People Bonds, links individual markets and constructs them into a network.

Currently, “The Belt and Road Initiative” covers roughly 70 countries, which entails a population of 4.5 billion and an overall economic scale of 29% of global GDP. From January to November 2025, China’s exports to countries along the Belt and Road Initiative will grow by 11.6% year-on-year, far exceeding the overall export growth rate of 5.4%. The trade surplus with countries along the Belt and Road Initiative reached USD \$480 billion, accounting for 45% of the total trade surplus, an increase of 16 percentage points compared to 2024.

Hong Kong and Macao are part of China. Both Hong Kong and Macau play an essential role in “The Belt and Road Initiative”. The four pillars of Hong Kong’s economy have traditionally been financial services, trade and logistics, tourism, and professional business support services. These sectors are the main drivers of Hong Kong’s economic growth and key sources of employment. The primary role of Hong Kong in “The Belt and Road Initiative” is shown in its financial advantages. Hong Kong is a renowned Global Financial Centre, Fintech Hub, and Offshore Renminbi Centre. ==As a gateway and connector that bridges mainland China with international markets, Hong Kong continues to provide excellent fundraising and professional financial services for the world.

Trading and Logistics also play an indispensable part. Hong Kong's trade and logistics performance is expected to recover strongly, despite global trade tensions. The overall value of exports increased by approximately 14.3% from January to November 2025. For example, the overall value of exports in November increased by 18.8% compared to the same period in 2024, while the value of imports increased by 18.1%. Benefiting from effective policies and the Belt and Road Initiative, Hong Kong's economy performed strongly in the third quarter of 2025. Real GDP grew by 3.8% year-on-year in the third quarter, a significant acceleration from the 3.1% growth in the previous quarter.

Complementing Hong Kong's role as a global financial gateway, Macao expands the reach of "The Belt and Road Initiative" through its identity as a melting pot of East and West for more than 500 years. Being the world-famous "Asian Las Vegas" and renowned for the Guia Circuit, Macao plays a vital role in the World Centre of Tourism and Leisure. Macao is the gateway to Portuguese-Speaking Countries as it has historical ties and is an established forum for economic and trade cooperation between China and Portuguese-speaking Countries. Through the strategic location initiative of Macao, it also plays as an essential hub city connecting the Greater Bay Area and Portuguese-speaking Countries. Benefiting from a strong rebound in the tourism industry, visitor arrivals to Macau reached a record high, driving growth in service exports and gaming revenue, resulting in real GDP reaching USD \$13 billion, a growth of 8.0% in the third quarter of 2025.

The merger between Hong Kong and Macao will create synergy and improve operational efficiency in the Belt and Road Initiative. While Hong Kong, as an international financial hub, enables free currency convertibility, unrestricted capital movement, and is open to the world, Macao can leverage its position to gain more profits as a tourism and entertainment city, and a city integrating Portuguese-Speaking Countries, the Greater Bay Area, and China. Hong Kong and Macao each have their own strengths, making a unique contribution by playing complementary roles in promoting regional cooperation to form a powerful synergy in the Greater Bay Area alignment with the Belt and Road Initiative.

Compared to the Silk Road, the "Belt and Road Initiative" has a wider scope, a broader community, and a more ambitious goal. It comprises massive infrastructure investment, production capacity output, and cultural exchange. Infrastructure investments are known to offer steady and reliable cash flows to investors. Revenues generated are often secured through long-term contracts with creditworthy entities, generally government bodies. Not only does it provide a predictable income, which can be resilient to economic cycles, but it also increases employment and logistics. It brings an increase in personal income, which stimulates spending. Increased consumption is key to improving the economy, increasing the flow of goods and funds. Common development and prosperity are the ultimate goals. "The Belt and Road Initiative" is more than just a trading route that connects individual markets into a network. It is building a community with a shared future for mankind.

When Camel Bells Meet Harbour Horns

Pui Ching Middle School (Macau), Cheng Seng Hei – 18

Morning haze creeps across the upturned eaves of A-Ma Temple; the sea breeze bears the stoneware allure of Ruins of St. Paul's, touching the lapels of my youthfully tailored coat. On this small land of Macao, my fingers move across the mottled bricked walls, touching a cultural life vein which extends over the hills and the ocean, through the ancient and modern eras—the Silk Road. This pearl embedded on the Maritime Silk Road begins to serve as the base from which I peer into the past and the future, filling the depths of my heart with an immeasurable amount of pride perceiving the worldwide accomplishments and the bright prospects of this grand civilization road.

This ancient road from the East was the leverage that elevated world civilization worldwide and hence left a deep mark on human history. It has been over 2, 200 years since Zhang Qian headed an expedition to the western direction through the vast desert, thereby being credited with the opening of the first land route from Asia to Europe. Around 1000 years after, Zheng He ended his seven, of, a, kind maritime voyages, which marked the release of the peaceful sails of the Maritime Silk Roads. In the meantime, the camel bell sounds had been periodically heard with no break at all, carrying along bright silks, teas, and porcelains destined for the palace at Rome and Persian bazaars, while the sea was filled with endless numbers of sails, thus, the four major inventions that made possible the leap, forward development of world science, technology, and culture were established. The German scholar Ferdinand von Richthofen referred to this long corridor of culture over the course of a thousand years as the “Silk Road” in a book titled *China*. This has since symbolized a corridor of culture for humanity. “To follow the Silk Road is to follow a ghost. It flows through the heart of Asia, but it has officially vanished leaving behind the pattern of its restlessness: counterfeit boarders, unmapped peoples. The road forks and wanders wherever you are. It is not a single way, but many: a web of choices.” says the awarded travel author from Britain, Colin Thubron. The Silk Road overcame geographical separations; it overcame the distance of cultures. Thus, Roman statues were combined well with Chang'an stone carvings. Persian poetry was combined well with Central Plains poetry.

When the clarion call of the new era sounded, the Belt and Road Initiative resonated like spring thunder, awakening the slumbering Silk Road and writing a stunning chapter of contemporary global achievements for this ancient passage of civilization. By transforming the Eurasian Continental Bridge into a fast route for European freight trains, China, through the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and the active development of free trade zones, has brought the spirit of the Silk Road into the current times beat with its open and inclusive nature. Now, there are over 150 countries and more than 30 international organization have signed cooperation documents on the Belt and Road Initiative. The ancient Silk Road has in fact been gradually transforming from a bold “freehand sketch” into a delicate “fine, brush painting, “ hence becoming the real engine of the world development. Locomotive sound has spread the isolation cried by the landlocked countries along railways in Africa; The giant vessel shuttles at the ports of Southeast Asia have bridged the oceans; In the European

factories, cooperative products have demonstrated the substance of mutual benefit and win, win while each continues to exist. President Xi Jinping emphasized, “The ancient Silk Road, stretching thousands of miles and enduring for a thousand years, has fostered a Silk Road spirit centered on peace and cooperation, openness and inclusiveness, mutual learning and mutual benefit.” The Silk Road in the new era is the revival and deepening of that very spirit. It dismisses the idea of zero sum games. On the contrary, it supports the concept of mutual benefits, thus, giving a ray of hope to a troubled world.

The footprints of the past are behind us, and the light of the future beckons before us. The future of the Silk Road is in front of us in a magnificent map. Bertrand Russell, the British philosopher, stated, “Contact between different civilizations has often in the past proved to be a milestone in human progress.” This coming Silk Road will be a high land of international cooperation for science and technology. Chinese 5G networks and the artificial intelligence of Europe will integrate seamlessly into each other. Southeast Asian digital economies and the smart cities of the African continent will join hands in a common mission to further the benefits of technology over the mountains and across the sea to all corners of the world.

As the I Ching goes, “Transformation leads to continuity, and continuity ensures perpetuity.” Innovation and cooperation will be the driving forces behind the Silk Road’s sustainable development. One example is when The Great Green Wall initiative was launched in China. Since the early 1980s, it has been recorded that over 66 billion trees have been planted, and the goal is to plant 36 billion more trees by 2030. The desert that has been around the cities to some extent, has been changed by around 20% after the mentioned tree planting campaign, which goes a long way in climate and biodiversity improvement. Above all, the new Silk Road will be a major driver of civilizational contact. Young people will gather to exchange ideas across borders; scholars will delve into history and culture for knowledge; painters will convey genuine emotions through the language of different cultures. Many civilizations will radiate brilliantly in each other’s interaction, sowing seeds of peace in all beings’ souls, embodying the inclusive philosophy of “The sea embraces all rivers for its capacity to hold vastness.”

As for Macao, the melting pot where cultures flow endlessly, it shall forever be a flourishing point on this magnificent cultural vein. Thanks to its special character as a bridge for economic and trade cooperation between China and Portuguese-speaking countries, it shall continue to span China and the world, and give expression to the story of civilization integration on the Silk Road. As the sun sets, it casts a golden shine over Macao’s coastline; the long, long camel bells harmoniously mix with the wailings of steel port alerts. I am standing on the soil, the same one that has witnessed all the changes of time during the long passages of the Silk Road, filled with great pride deep in my heart. From Macao, we can see the splendid past of the Silk Road and from Macao, we can also look into the bright future of the Silk Road. This golden chain of events that have been stamped time and again in the history of human civilization, will certainly compose a more magnificent chapter in the new era, reflecting into the shared future of mankind. I, a middle school student from Macao, am eager to embody and pass on the spirit of the Silk Road. I, along with young people around the world, will be the successors and builders of this road of civilization. The spirit of the Silk Road, characterized by cooperation, inclusiveness, and shared benefits, will shine brightly across the river of time.