



# Non-fiction

Group 3

# New Tales of China's Silk Road

*Carmel Pak U Secondary School, Choi, Sum Yi Amanda – 12*

## Introduction

Have you ever wondered how the Silk Road became a massive two-way trade route spanning almost the entirety of Southeast Asia, a portion of Africa, and then into Europe, lasting over 2,200 years? Well, it all started as a small trading system in China, which was established by the Han dynasty of China around 130 BCE. It was mostly used to easily trade goods that the other countries did not have, for example, silk, spices, and precious metals. It also had a greater significance of being a crucial conduit for the exchange of ideas, religion, technologies, art, and even diseases, which shaped civilisations and laid the groundwork for global interaction.

## Historical Background

The Silk Road started in the 2nd century BCE with China's Han Dynasty, specifically after imperial envoy Zhang Qian's exploratory missions to Central Asia, which established contact with the western world and revealed a lot of potential for trade routes from east to west, leading to organized trade routes trading many goods like spices, horses, and the most traded silk. The Silk Road grew exponentially fast due to its popularity, but because of all the popularity, Rome and beyond demanded silk, which enabled China to foster vast networks of trade between empires like the Roman and Parthian empires, which provided stability and expansion via sea and land routes driven by mercantile interest, technological advances like navigation and shipbuilding, the exchange of goods, ideas, and cultures, which became a complex web connecting Eurassia and North Africa. Some Major Silk Road cities included eastern hubs like Xi'an (Chang'an) and Dunhuang, Central Asian jewels like Samarkand, Bukhara, and Kashgar, Persian centers like Isfahan, Mesopotamian cities such as Baghdad, and western termini like Constantinople (Istanbul) and Antioch, facilitating vast trade and cultural exchange across the continents.

## Economic Impact

The Silk Road had a vast array of goods that were traded along the Silk Road, with China sending porcelain, tea, spices, paper, gunpowder, and, most famously, Silk, which was all traded westward by China while receiving Horses, glassware, wool, gold, silver, and furs from central Asia, the Mediterranean, and Europe. It was a massive exchange of luxury items, raw materials, foods, and cultural ideas, including religions and technologies were traded in both directions. The trading of luxury goods like spices and silk really helped to generate wealth for merchants and cities, which fostered new industries, stimulating urban development and facilitating the spread of crucial technologies like papermaking and compasses (navigation), and innovations, which led to interconnecting prosperity and expanding markets across Eurasia. Some cities were also really crucial points in the Silk Road, including Xi'an, Samarkand, Damascus, and Alexandria. I have always wanted to travel to Alexandria because of the Catacombs of Kom el Shoqafa. I have always been fascinated by the catacombs because of the fusion of Greek, Roman, and Egyptian architecture, art, and burial styles. The catacombs are a place to see a fusion of three famous cultures in one area. Another area I would love to visit is Xi'an. Xi'an has amazing things to see, but I would love to see the famous Terracotta Warriors. The Warriors show how developed the people were at that time. The architects put a lot of effort into the small details on the armour and face of the warriors, and I find that really fascinating.

## Cultural Exchange

The Silk Road was used for many things, not only trade, but also the exchange of Languages, art, and Religions. Throughout the Silk Road trade route, countries met with different languages and cultures, which led to a huge group of people knowing each other. Ideas of different countries spread along the Silk Road through merchants, monks, and travellers, who carried knowledge, religions, philosophies, arts, and even food across Eurasia, which transformed societies through intellectual and cultural exchange in bustling trade hubs all across the Silk Road.

Learning new Languages played an important and crucial role in economic growth, cultural enrichment, and the spread of knowledge across the interconnected regions of Eurasia. Learning new languages has benefited countries and society in many ways. For example, facilitating trade, direct communication in local and common languages was essential for merchants to negotiate prices, establish trust, and trade effectively. The merchants who could not communicate with others missed out on chances for good trades. Another example of how languages helped is the exchange of ideas and technologies. Language learning facilitated the transmission of ideas, beliefs, and technologies. For example, the Chinese learned about Indian culture and religion, while technologies like papermaking spread from China all around the world.

### Challenges and Changes

People who were traders and travellers faced many dangers travelling across the Silk Road. Most of the challenges were from the environment; travellers had to walk through scorching hot deserts for hours, sometimes even days, and they had to climb up mountains that were dangerous hazards because of avalanches and animals. Travellers did not have navigation back then, so there were no maps or compasses, so they had to rely on landmarks to find their way, but it was very risky. Another challenge was not to get robbed; there were many bandits and robbers on the Silk Road, who were a massive threat to travellers, especially in areas with very little law enforcement. Caravans were often attacked, their goods stolen, and the travellers were either killed or kidnapped. Even though the Silk Road seemed safe, it was a death hazard along the Silk Road.

### Conclusion

In this essay, we talked about how many things were traded and spread around the world, like ideas and technologies. We also talked about how something that seems useless can be very useful for development. We also talked about how many dangers travellers have faced on the Silk Road. The Silk Road is still very important to this day as a model for globalisation, which inspired modern infrastructure projects. This essay made me want to learn about a new culture, which is North Africa's culture; its wide variety of arts and music is so fascinating to me.

# From Small Trade to Big Business: The New Tales of the Silk Road

*Creative Secondary School, Keco, Mato – 11*

## Introduction

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# A Graffiti Comes to Life

*ESF Island School, Mithaiwala, Burhanuddin – 13*

As Zhang Qian, the father of the Silk Road, famously said, “to travel thousands of miles is better than to read thousands of books”.

Zhang, a pioneer sent to find allies, while travelling significant parts of Asia, informed Emperor Wu of powerful horses, the demand for silk, and the sophistication of societies in Afghanistan, who recognised the benefits of trade, which ultimately led to the establishment of the Silk Road.

Marco Polo, one of the greatest explorers in history, describes his journeys on the Silk Road in his ‘Book of Wonders’, which is still referred to in present times. So, who was he really? Marco was a little boy from Venice who travelled along the whole Silk Road for the Mongol Emperor Kublai Khan. He travelled with his father and uncle, gaining knowledge about different cultures in Europe. After a journey, he would return with wealth and scholars who would teach Kublai Khan about the world outside the Mongol Empire.

Marco Polo says, “I did not tell half of what I saw as I knew I would not be believed.” Marco Polo’s discoveries brought a new era of inventions, developments, and friendships. From Marco Polo, we can learn the importance of curiosity and the power of storytelling.

Welcome to today's news report on New Tales of China’s Silk Road, brought to you by Burhanuddin Mithaiwala.

The Silk Roads, also known as Routes, were paths that connected China to Rome and Europe, offering numerous trading opportunities for goods such as silk, spices, and gold. It stretched over 9000 kilometres, going over deadly mountains and burning deserts. It not only traded goods but also ideas and religions.

The Silk Road facilitated the development of safer long-distance exploration methods for empires. It also nurtured connections of ideas, which led to advancements and innovations. The Silk Road led nations to obtain products they had never had before.

As much as I hate to say, the Silk Routes were not all good. The interactions it facilitated led to the spread of various diseases, including smallpox. This happened as some groups of people had not been exposed to those viruses before, leading to a large number of deaths and pandemics. Apart from this, many small countries were unable to participate in this trade, causing their economy to decline, allowing many nations to become superpowers, such as the Han and Roman empires.

I am currently in Da XueXi, which has marvellous graffiti of a jade merchant and his journeys on the Silk Road. Let me tell you the tale of these artworks. The first piece of art depicts a merchant setting out on his lean camel, carrying a staggering amount of Jade. On top of him, the sun is blazing while the wind sweeps through the air.

The merchant is entering Mongolia, his first destination. The air is chilly, and the sun hides behind clouds. Here, he interacts with other traders and exchanges jade for money and silk. Silk manufactured in Mongolia is affordable and of high quality due to its extreme climate. Families use jade as gifts to show gratitude and symbolise love.

The next piece of art features cherry blossoms, tall mountains, and beautiful pagodas. You guessed it! The merchant is now in Japan. Many people with high religious status crowd our merchants to be the first ones to buy jade. They believe it absorbs negative energy and connects the physical world to the spiritual realm. Over here, the merchant approaches an antique shop located in the wild, where he trades his earned money for some fine paper.

Now, the graffiti illustrates a world in the middle of nowhere. Below is the burning sand, while above, the wind howls through the desert. But fortunately, there is a tiny village. Many merchants are resting here to regain

strength. Food stalls here sell sumptuous delicacies, while the accommodations are five-star. After much-needed leisure, the merchant sets out once more.

On the walls of our penultimate painting are bright colours. In India, the merchant passes through acres of lush green land full of chillies, peppers and other spices. Rich people in this nation pay handsomely for jade. They store it as an investment, like gold and silver and wait for it to appreciate to make more money. In return, the merchant takes powerful spices and sets off towards the final destination.

The gentle waves crash against the bright yellow shore. A small breeze sweeps the air, travelling over huge cliffs. Welcome to Persia! Over here, the merchants stock up on medicinal herbs while the aristocrats buy their jade. The aristocrats use it in weapons and armour as it is believed to give the wielder the strength to defeat their enemy.

Sadly, this is where our graffiti ends. But till this day, its magnificent paintings weave a colourful and mesmerising story. We have experienced the long, rich and somewhat harsh travels of merchants on the Silk Road. But is it worth it? Let's find out!

There are pros and cons of being a merchant on the Silk Road. The merchants must take many risks during their journey. The Silk Road is not flat ground, but it passes through extreme temperatures, resulting in a lack of food and water. Many robbers and bandits lie along the Silk Road waiting to steal from travelling merchants. They can injure, rob, and even kill some merchants. Lastly, merchants can contract deadly diseases such as plague, which can be life-threatening.”

At the same time, being a merchant can be extremely rewarding. Successful merchants become very wealthy, gain power and increase their status. Some merchants even come up with ideas, such as religions, and become missionaries who help to grow and advocate for their inventions and beliefs.”

Before we end the news report, let's talk about some famous people on the Silk Road and their words of wisdom.

As I mentioned earlier, Marco Polo travelled the whole Silk Road. His 'Book of Wonders', a tale of his journeys, taught Europe all about the wealth and riches in China. This sparked interest and inspired many explorers, such as Columbus, who boosted trade and led to advancement.

Zhang Qian liked to say, “To travel thousands of miles is better than reading thousands of books.” Zhang Qian shows us that meeting new people, travelling, and exploring teach us more than reading the travels of others. His curiosity is inspiring, as without it, the Silk Road would not have existed, making interactions impossible, and advancements would have taken longer.

Last but not least, we have Buddhist monk Xuan Zang. He travelled for 17 years from China to India in search of Buddhist statues and scriptures. He translated the Sanskrit into Chinese and brought it back to China using the Silk Road. He then spread Buddhism and became enormously famous.

He famously stated, “ I would rather die by going to the west than live by staying in the east.” This quote teaches us the importance of hard work in achieving desired goals. In this case, Xuan Zang means that he would rather have died in search of Buddhist scriptures in India than remain in China and not achieve his goal.

To conclude, the Silk Road played an incredibly important role in the advancement of the world. It brought nations together, encouraged new ideas, and fostered relationships and inventions. Many explorers, like Marco Polo and Xuan Zang, travelled this Silk Road and shared their learnings, which changed the way humanity interacted with each other. Without the Silk Road, the world would not be what it is today.

That will be it for today's news report. And next time you use a glass, wear silk clothes, or invest in gold, remember the long journey they took on the Silk Road to make it possible for you to enjoy it.

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# Silk Road

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The Silk Road, an ancient network of trade routes, has long captured the imagination of historians, travelers, and scholars alike. Spanning more than 4,000 miles across Asia, it was not merely a route for the exchange of silk—although that was certainly its namesake—but a complex web that facilitated the flow of goods, ideas, cultures, and religions. Running from the eastern edges of China to the Mediterranean, the Silk Road played a crucial role in shaping the civilizations it connected. This essay explores the historical significance, cultural exchanges, and enduring legacy of the Silk Road, shedding light on how this ancient pathway continues to resonate in the modern world.

—The concept of the Silk Road is often attributed to the 19th-century German geographer Ferdinand von Richthofen, who coined the term to describe a series of interconnected trade routes established during the Han Dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE). The initial motivations for the development of these routes were primarily economic. China, with its wealth of silk, spices, and other luxury goods, had a burgeoning market. The demand for silk in the West, especially in Rome and later in Byzantium, created an insatiable appetite for trade.

The Silk Road's routes can be divided into the Northern Route, which connected China to Central Asia, and the Southern Route, which led through the deserts and mountains of present-day Afghanistan and Iran, eventually reaching the Mediterranean. Various empires along the way, including the Parthian Empire, the Roman Empire, and later the Byzantine and Ottoman Empires, contributed to the trade that enriched societies, enmeshed cultures, and fostered exchanges of philosophical and religious thought.

—Silk was undoubtedly the star product on the Silk Road, but to view it solely through the lens of this luxurious fabric would be to miss the richness of the entire trade network. Goods traded along the Silk Road included spices like pepper and cinnamon, precious stones, textiles, and even technologies such as papermaking and printing. The exchange was not limited to commodities; it extended to ideas, art, and innovations.

In return for silk, China acquired horses, a notable demand for its armies, along with innovations including the wheel and various agricultural techniques. The West, in particular, benefited from the myriad of goods and technologies exchanged along the trade routes. The intricate patterns on Persian carpets, the artistry of Chinese porcelain, and the ingenuity of Middle Eastern mathematical texts all arrived via this network, enriching the cultures on both sides.

—While trade was the lifeblood of the Silk Road, the true tapestry of its significance is woven with the threads of cultural exchange. The Silk Road facilitated not only the sharing of goods but also the exchange of ideas, religions, and philosophical doctrines. Buddhism, for instance, traveled eastward from India into China along these routes, transforming the spiritual landscape of the East. Along the way, Buddhism adapted to the various cultures it encountered, resulting in distinct schools that flourished in different regions.

## The Role of Cities

Cities along the Silk Road served as crucial hubs of trade and culture. Places such as Samarkand and Bukhara in modern-day Uzbekistan, and Chang'an (present-day Xi'an) in China, became melting pots of cultures, languages, and religions. These cities flourished as centers of scholarship, offering a refuge for scholars and travelers to share ideas and conduct business.

Chang'an, as the starting point of the Silk Road, was a cosmopolitan city where merchants from diverse backgrounds converged. It served as a political and cultural capital, fostering innovations that would ripple through time. Bukhara and Samarkand, situated at the crossroads of various routes, played similar roles, becoming centers of Islamic learning and culture.

Throughout their histories, these cities exemplified how trade could enrich not only economies but also the cultures and societies engaged in it. The architectural wonders that emerged from this exchange, such as the Registan in Samarkand, showcase the aesthetic and artistic contributions borne out of the Silk Road's connectivity.

## The Decline and Legacy

However, the golden age of the Silk Road began to decline in the late medieval period, largely due to the rise of maritime trade routes and political instability. The discovery of the sea route to Asia by European explorers shifted the focus from land-based trade to oceanic expeditions. Furthermore, the onset of the Mongol Empire initially revitalized and expanded the Silk Road, but internal strife and external pressures eventually caused its fragmentation.

Nonetheless, the legacy of the Silk Road endures. It laid the foundation for global trade networks and established early forms of interconnectivity between cultures. The concepts of globalization that define our modern world can trace roots back to this ancient network. Today, countries across Asia and Europe recognize the importance of the Silk Road, with initiatives such as China's Belt and Road Initiative attesting to the enduring relevance of these historical trade routes.

—The Silk Road was more than a mere pathway for the exchange of goods; it was a dynamic and multifaceted network that fostered economic growth, cultural exchange, and mutual understanding among diverse peoples. Its historical significance continues to resonate today, reminding us of the power of connectivity in shaping societies. As we look to the future, we can draw inspiration from the Silk Road, embracing the principles of collaboration and dialogue to build a more interconnected, harmonious world.

# The Silk Road

*ESF Renaissance College, Cheung, Gordon – 11*

The Silk Road was not a single road; it was a vast system of roads that people used to trade with each other. These roads connected many towns that were far apart in Europe and Asia. I like to think about caravans traveling over mountains and deserts and through busy markets. The Silk Road had people from all kinds of cultures, and you would see all sorts of colorful fabrics and smell all sorts of interesting things. The Silk Road was helpful because it let people share ideas, new technologies, and customs with each other, and of course, they also traded goods with each other on the Silk Road. The Silk Road was significant because it facilitated the exchange of knowledge that shaped civilizations, in addition to commerce.

The Chinese Han Dynasty, which ruled from roughly 206 BCE to 220 CE, is where the Silk Road got its start. Many people consider this time to be among China's most prosperous and significant periods. Significant advancements in political structure, technology, and art were made during the Han Dynasty. Emperor Han Wudi sent explorers and envoys to build trade routes that would link China with the rest of the world after realizing that trade could improve China's prosperity and security.

The Silk Road was a name that people started using in the century. The Silk Road itself was something that grew over time. It was made up of different routes. Some of these routes were on water. Some were on land. The Silk Road connected cities like Xi'an, which was the center of the silk trade. It also connected Xi'an to places that were far away, like Rome and Constantinople. The Silk Road even went to some parts of Africa. All of these places were connected over a long distance. More than 4,000 miles. The Silk Road was an important network that helped people trade things like silk. When people traveled on these routes, they met people from cultures where they heard different languages, and they saw different customs. They had to deal with kinds of environments, like deserts, mountains, and rivers, as they made their way. The travelers and traders experienced new things on their journeys, and they learned about the different cultures they encountered on the routes.

The Silk Road would not have grown without the help of tribes from Central Asia. These nomadic tribes from Central Asia were like a connection between traders and other Western places. The Sogdian traders from Central Asia were really good at trading. They could easily fit in with different cultures. The Sogdian traders, from Central Asia, could talk to people from various areas because they could speak many languages.

The Silk Road network was really connected to Sogdian traders. These Sogdian traders did a lot of things along the way. They set up businesses and trading posts in cities. The Silk Road network and Sogdian traders took advantage of the things they saw. They saw a lot of products and cultures. The Sogdian traders built roads for trade that people really needed. The Silk Road network and these trade routes helped people connect and buy things. The Sogdian traders moved goods, like silk and spices, and precious

metals, over long distances.

The Middle Eastern traders, like the Parthians, played a role in the Silk Road trade. They brought valuable things to the markets, such as nice clothes, expensive jewels, and spices. In return, they got things like silk, paper, and other stuff from the East, which they then sold in their markets. This trade of valuable things helped people from different cultures learn from each other and become better friends. The Silk Road trade was important for the Middle Eastern traders. It helped them get things they needed as the Parthians did.

The Silk Road was not about silk. It had a lot of other things too. People traded all sorts of goods on the Silk Road. These goods were special in their way. For example, spices were really important. People used spices to make food last longer and to make it taste better. They also traded metals, ceramics, and precious stones. These were all goods. The Silk Road was also important for the spread of ideas and inventions. Things like paper and gunpowder were. Then spread to other places along the Silk Road. The

Silk Road had an influence on societies for a long time after these things were first made.

The Silk Road was really important for people to share ideas and cultures. When merchants traveled, they took their languages, customs, and beliefs with them. They met people from places and shared things. Buddhism and other religions came from India. Went to China and other places, which changed what people believed in a lot of

places. The people who traded things helped everyone feel more connected to each other by talking about their ideas and sharing things with each other, not just selling goods. The Silk Road was a part of this, and it made the world feel smaller. Merchants on the Silk Road played a role in making people understand that they are all connected, and the Silk Road helped people learn about each other's customs, languages, and beliefs.

These interactions really helped science and art to grow. When different artistic styles and techniques were mixed together, new and unique art forms were created that showed the cultures that people met on their travels. For example, the decorations on stupas in Central Asia have a lot of Greco–Roman art in them, which shows how different cultures can come together and inspire each other. The art forms that were created during this time are an example of what happens when science and art work together, and the Buddhist stupas are a good illustration of this, with their mix of different cultural influences from the science and art of the time.

The Silk Road was not just a place where people traded goods; it was also a hub for the exchange of scientific knowledge. They shared ideas about math and the stars, which led to some important discoveries. A long time ago, during the Islamic Golden Age, people were generating innovative ideas in various fields. Scholars and traders would talk to each other. Share what they knew. They would exchange books and ideas with each other. The Silk Road is also where people in Europe first learned about the compass. The compass was a deal because it changed the way people navigated. It just goes to show that one invention, like the compass, can really change the course of history. The compass is an example of how something can have a big impact.

The merchants had to get ready for their trips. They made sure they had food and water, and they knew what the terrain was like. The merchants had to know about the Silk Road so they could be prepared for what they would face on their journey, on the Silk Road.

The Silk Road was a scary place to travel. You never knew when you would run into bandits. To be safe, traders usually traveled in groups. Many traders had to join to form caravans so they could protect themselves from bad people.

The Silk Road was also dangerous because of things like floods and big storms. Traveling the Silk Road was really tough due to the Silk Road having disasters and severe weather, and other things that you just did not expect to happen on the Silk Road.

The Silk Road was really something that old societies did. It connected the East and the West so they could trade things and share ideas. The first people who used the Silk Road were explorers, good business people, and lots of different cultures. These people helped shape what happened in the world. The Silk Road still matters today; it reminds us that trade and talking to each other are important for bringing the world together. The Silk Road is a part of history and its impact is still felt now the Silk Road is something that people remember and learn from the Silk Road is very important.

When we think about the stories of these traders and the good deals they made on the Silk Road, we see how important their trips were for making globalization happen. The Silk Road was really important for globalization. We can make our own lives better by learning about and sharing ideas with cultures, which is something the Silk Road teaches us about the Silk Road. We can learn a lot from the curious traders of the past who traveled to new places to meet new people and make connections with other traders on the Silk Road. The Silk Road continues to represent harmony and the human spirit's yearning to discover, interact, and develop.

# New Tales of China's Silk Road

*ESF Sha Tin College, Cheng, Sunny Tin Ching – 12*

## What is the Silk Road?

The “Silk road” is not just a single road, it’s actually a whole network used for traders and merchants for over 15 centuries. The silk road stretches for over 6,400 kilometers, across some of the world’s most intimidating landscapes, like the Gobi Desert and the Pamir Mountains.

## How did the Silk Road begin?

The “Silk roads” began in 130BCE, when the Han Dynasty’s mission led by Zhang Qian to form military alliances with the west to learn and explore about the western regions for the Han Dynasty

## System of Trading

People traded many different goods, not only silk itself! They traded many goods, for example spices, glasses, jewellery, horses, weapons, porcelain, paper, tea, gunpowder, fur and the well known— Silk. But not only physical things were being traded, even thoughts like ideas, religions, and cultural practices such as music and dance! There were also skills traded, like techniques when it comes to papermaking, sewing, and dancing.

## Challenges faced by Traders

During the journey of trading, several risky challenges were encountered on the way by traders. Dangerous road conditions such as extremely narrow and high roads that may be life-threatening to walk on. Traders often are only able to avoid this by going to their destination using longer routes that, most of the time, require longer time to walk through. On poorly marked roads, groups of robbers or bandits specifically target traders due to the large amount of goods they carry. In order to avoid this threat, traders go around the roads by caravans, to avoid being targeted. Difficult terrains like the Gobi desert and the Pamir mountains require extreme determination due to its long distance and steep pathways. Lack of natural resources such as food, water, and shelters makes this challenge even harder. Since the weather is always in doubt, making sandstorms, duststorms, and the constant temperature rise and fall unpredictable.

## Diseases

Infectious diseases such as bubonic plague, smallpox, and anthrax were carried along the silk roads, and if infected, could lead to death. Parasitic worms such as tapeworm, whipworm, and roundworm were found in over 2,000 feces found on several roads in the Silk Road. This means that the food carried by the traders may be undercooked and unsanitary, which leads to parasitic worms roaming in their bodies.

## Why is the Silk Road named the Silk Road?

The Silk Road got its name from the most valuable and famous item traded through the legendary network. It was named by a French geographer Fredinand von Richthofen in 1877 to describe the historical network of trading routes. Although those outside the large system called it the Silk Road, the traders themselves didn’t call the network that. The merchants on the other hand, didn’t have a single nor universal name for what’s known as the “Silk road” today. Instead, merchants had many names for it, such as “The Royal Road”, “The Jade Road”, and “The Steppe Road”.

## Where is the Silk Road

The Silk Road started in Xi'an, then went through many other cities! It goes through Uzbekistan, and specifically passes through Samarkand, Bukhara, and Khiva. It also goes through many other cities, such as Dunhuang, Lanzhou, Almaty, Tashkent, Jiayuguan, Urumqi, Zhangye, Baku, Balkh, Bursa, Constantinople, Hotan, Kashgar, Merv, Song-Kul Lake/Kyrgyzstan, Tianshui, Turpan, and Zhangye. These places combined, cover a surprising total of 6,400 kilometers. That's the length of the world's longest river, the Amazon river!

### Can we still visit the Silk Road nowadays?

Yes, we can still have access to some parts of the silk roads nowadays, but some parts are either too dangerous or difficult for us to access. But parts of the Silk Road in countries such as Samarkand in Uzbekistan, Baku in Azerbaijan, and Xi'an in China are still able to be accessed today. The ruins and posts in those cities or countries were once a crucial center of trading back when the Silk Road's trading were still active. Challenging parts of the Silk Roads; aren't as easy to access, since they are rather geographically challenging. Stunning heritage sites such as the Pamir Mountains and the Gobi Desert require days—if not weeks of walking, and the high altitudes and the long stretches can even lead to risky challenges such as climbing and walking for long distances while having a limited supply of natural resources—food and water. Other politically risky parts such as locations in Iran, Syria, and Afghanistan. Iran can't be accessed due to the risk of terrorism, kidnapping, arbitrary arrest of U.S. citizens, and wrongful detention. Not only that, but even the U.S. government advises citizens not to go there because of those reasons. Syria is dangerous to go to due to the ongoing civil war which has claimed over 525 000 lives since 2011. Lastly Afghanistan is dangerous due to limited health facilities, civil unrest, kidnapping, and terrorism.

### What languages were spoken on the Silk Road?

The merchants often used different languages for trading different goods. When trading silk, merchants spoke mandarin, since silk was from China. When spreading religions like Buddhism and Christianity was often spread in Sanskrit (for Buddhism), and Syriac (for Christianity).

### Who was the most famous Silk Road traveler?

The most famous Silk Road traveler is Marco Polo, when he was at the age of 17, going to China with his uncle. His journey in China started in 1271, and ended in 1294, which lasted 24 years. He went to China because he was part of a merchant family and their goal was to establish trade, explore parts of the east (things like Christianity)

The spreading of Christianity was mainly known as Nestorianism on the Silk Road. During 781, an inscribed stele revealed Nestorian Christian missionaries make an appearance on the Silk Road. The Syriac language and different types of worship were distributed along the Silk Road, thanks to Christianity spreading.

### Transmission of Buddhism

The spreading of Buddhism to China via the Silk Road first started in the 1st century CE, primarily through traveling monks, pilgrims, and merchants who carried its teachings, scriptures, and art through the Silk Road. Soon, Buddhists started establishing many monasteries in oasis towns while different cultural and economic clubs with unique strong figures and translation helped fill the cultural gaps and soon brought it to its adaptation and rapidly increasing across Asia as well as the Silk Road. The monasteries were specifically made in oasis towns, since it could be served for many different purposes, for example a resting spot for traders while also being the center of trade. As traders stop by, monks would share the Buddha's message and help translate texts. Early missionaries, including the ones from King Ashoka from the 3rd century, traveled the Silk Roads, where they distributed oral traditions. Later, groups of Central Asian monks traveled to the east, where they then translated scripts to Chinese.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the Silk Road wasn't just a single road. Instead, it was a foundational "worldwide web". From trading physical items such as the well known silk to lives, its real legacy lies in the unbreakable bonds that were formed along the way, ideas told to see a point in a different perspective, and stories told to show its deep meaning, and what could be known as a myth nowadays. Merchants went through many obstacles along the way, constantly going through tests of resilience, determination, and accuracy. The Silk Road tells us a million stories of resilience, cultural fusion, and the enormous power of connectivity. Ultimately, the Silk Road concludes with the fact and realization that physical distance is no match for positive spirit and companionship. The journey, whether a historic trade route or a personal pilgrimage, teaches us that the most significant connections are those built through shared purpose and resilience.

# Ancient Routes of Exchange

*ESF Sha Tin College, Xue, Celina – 12*

The Silk Road stands as one of history's most iconic trade routes, embodying a remarkable network of interconnected pathways to exchange of goods, military equipment, gold, ideas, weapons, spreading religions and cultures across continents. The Silk Road played a crucial role in shaping civilizations and fostering global interaction. Its legacy gives us insights into the development of human societies and how it fosters interconnection and interdependence.

The origins of the Silk Road can be traced back to around 138 BCE during the Han Dynasty, "Zhang Qian" an empower wanted to connect with Central Asia to trade and then slowly the "Silk Road" was made, not just to China, but to go to certain places around the world. It was a certain route through mountains and deserts, in which traders would follow to trade goods. It was named after one of its most prized possessions "silk". The road's significance continued for centuries, its simple route helped people to connect with other countries, share different goods, technological advancements, political stability and economic demand. An economic factor was that traders would transport valuable goods across the different countries, and an environmental factor was that geography of the Silk Road showed challenges from its natural barriers such as deserts and mountains, which needed solutions for transportation and navigation.

China did not reveal how silk production was made and kept it a secret which kept their economic power, making it highly bought in foreign markets until around 200 BC knowledge had spread about silk's production and people then knew how silk was made. Chinese silk became a prized possession in the Roman Empire, traders from Rome and other countries would travel to China and trade for silk. A psychological factor also played a role; people were drawn to exotic items from foreign lands not out of necessity but because these items symbolized status. Taking the example from "silk", it was not a survival essential but was highly bought due to its luxurious texture and association with wealth. In return, countries would then trade China their horses for farming, goods, food, spices, spreading their cultural religions, ideas, jewelry etc. These exchanges created interdependence among countries.

The Silk Road was more than just a conduit for goods; it was also a route for unique ideas and beliefs. Religions such as Buddhism, Islam, Christianity, Zoroastrianism, and Hinduism spread along the silk road, shaping societies and their beliefs. For example, Buddhism traveled from India to China, which influenced Chinese culture and art. Cultural exchange was quite significant. Merchants and travelers moved along the route, they brought with them their languages, traditions, arts, and cuisines. This blending of cultures caused societies to develop a diverse place with peoples different food, arts and beliefs.

The flow of trading ideas and knowledge was also significant, people from different places would travel and share their scientific discoveries, medical practices, and technological innovations along the Silk Road which interconnected people together.

The different types of arts from other cultures/countries have influenced us, for example chinese ceramics were inspired by Islamic pottery designs. These creative ideas exchanges show the different cultural traditions and it inspires artists in the modern world today.

The Silk Road was far more than a trade route; it was a bridge that connected diverse cultures and civilizations across vast distances. From its origins during the Han Dynasty to its lasting influence on modern society today, it shows how people from all around the world can follow the route and trade with others, share ideas and build relationships with countries. By fostering relationships between nations, sharing different cultural practices, the Silk Road shaped history throughout the centuries.

# The Silk Road

*ESF West Island School, Jassar, Zishaan – 12*

## Origins

Over 2100 years ago in the midst of the Han dynasty era the Chinese Silk Road officially began. The Emperor Wu sent a Chinese diplomat with the name of Zhang Qian around 130BCE to travel west and make allies with the foreign forces to help fight the Xiong nu, a group which caused issues in the local area. During his voyages he discovered new islands, met different people and experienced different cultures. He also saw so many new and smart goods that China had never traded with before. Due to his amazing discoveries, China built the silk road, a massive route built to maximise profit, trade and industrialization. This later on connected China with central Asia and beyond allowing people to share goods, ideologies and cultures across big distances for generations. When the formal routes were first introduced universally, primarily connecting Ancient China with the Mediterranean and Europe region China grew rapidly to later on coming up high and rise up to being a global superpower.

## Present state

The Chinese Silk Road was founded and carried down followed by generations and generations of trade in goods and products. In the present timeline this has evolved day by day to become a complex web system and a BRI (Belt and Road initiative) which connects modernised superpower country China to over 150 countries ranging from sea to land. The silk road in modern days is in a refined condition where many ancient Silk road cities are now tourist destinations and national trade hubs such as samarkand, Xian and venice. Across the country the Chinese silk road showcases palaces, mansions, temples, vibrant culture, graceful nature and new experiences.

## Importance

China's gains from the Silk road are outrageously vast and are extremely wild surpassing trillions of USD in trade. This much money and these many expeditions have rapidly increased China's geopolitical power as well as the relationship between China and other countries. Significant growth can also be seen in economical value, GDP, budget of various sectors and overall benefit for China from the Silk Road further improving China's role as a global economic power and debt collector which boosts market growth and gathers various parties of traders and investors which when brought together enhances China's power to grow rapidly to this date with the help of power through massive trade growth.

## Future growth

With all the information I have gathered and all the facts I have researched I assume that in the near future China will invest more money into the Silk Road further going deep into africa and europe gaining billions and billions which later on could go in to aerial investment like general cargo and special cargo which are 2 main categories of air cargo which could gain a profit of billions after China stabilizes it's government and after China becomes close allies with countries like for a quicker and safer profit:

- 1.USA – due to the military power and tech leader
- 2.India – due to the rapid growing economy
- 3.Russia – due to the energy supply and area
- 4.Japan – due to the advanced technology
- 5.European union – due to the man power

Once China is great allies with the top 5 countries then China could invest more in the silk road but not on earth but rather in space gathering more information about our universe creating new technology and products which might revolutionise China on another level.

#### Conclusion (summary)

In conclusion I believe that China's Silk Road is a colossal success for the Chinese economy and I think that China has benefited a lot by the help of the Silk Road. Especially the part where China has profited a stupendous amount of money which is valued as high as gold. Talking about gold the Silk Road nowadays holds a staggering 50% of China's trade in 2024 and 51.8% in 2025. Over 100s of goods from all over the world are being traded on the Silk Road. Since 130 BCE to when it shut down the silk road has played a key role in Ancient China's expeditions. Since it reopened to present timeline the silk road has changed how China trades to the world. Coming into the future the Silk Road stands high and wide continuing to enlarge its influence across different areas of the world.

# Why the Original Network is Failing

*Good Hope School, Yau, Megan – 14*

Time moves fast in modern society. We forget in a blink; stories, history and news are not spared. The Silk Road is no exception, its name remains only as a memorial as the wave of time washes over it, hiding it away from our impotent eyes forever.

For centuries, the Silk Road has been arguably one of the most extraordinary networks, morphing mankind forever. It united cultures, broadcast religion and augmented access to goods all over the world. The extraordinary discovery fuelled the great advancement of technology and development of the world economy. For many, it was also an unprecedented opportunity to broaden their horizons to the staggering world that was once unknown to them. The East would bring along tea, dyes, perfumes, porcelain while the West would furnish honey, wine, gold, the list goes on. Among them, one stood out. While all goods were highly demanded, the Chinese dominated with its silk, monopolizing the market and giving its iconic name, Silk Road.

Yet, the Silk Road, like the delicate fabric it was named after, was fragile. It required careful curation and care which is hardly guaranteed when the world is at constant competition. Furthermore, silk's vulnerability was not merely metaphorical, its major antagonist was fittingly water. As the discovery of new sea trade routes flourish, many countries have moved to transporting goods on water. Likewise, newly discovered marine routes bring along advantages that are far superior to the Silk Road, which mainly stands stubbornly on land.

Simultaneously, political tensions led to closed borders and severed trade links. Religion has also grown hostile over the years, with wars breaking out over the ideas of divinity. Finally, the very purpose of the silk road to exchange ideas is replaced by an intangible force—the Internet. Newer ideas no longer require exchange through the Silk Road but instead now find themselves flowing freely on the Internet. Ultimately, the Silk Road has been completely stripped of its excellence as replacements that are smoother, safer and more swift begin to arise. The piece of silk is being stretched and only continues to sprawl in the coming future, stretching and extending until it rips with a “snap”.

Indeed, water is the superior antagonist in this story. The refinement of boats and opening of water routes such as the Cape of Good Hope have doomed land routes like the Silk Road. Firstly, land routes are packed with difficult terrain, while people previously had to spend days crossing mountains, boats can completely avoid them with ease. Secondly, maritime trades are cost efficient, it requires significantly less resources such as fuel for land animals and vehicles, maximizing profit for merchants and investors. Furthermore, the invention of aircraft and air routes created a third dimension for trades, allowing transportation through air without having to worry about difficult terrains and having a large capacity which only comes with the single drawback of being pricey. These new mediums of transport serve to replace the traditional Silk Road and provide maximum efficiency, attracting countries to use them for trades instead. The Silk Road was, ultimately, a brilliant but fragile network, undone by the very qualities it was created to serve and the connectivity it had once pioneered.

However, the Silk Road is also being affected by the indomitable destruction of nature. As our world falls into a crisis of global warming, baking ourselves to death, our Silk Road is burning with us. Climate change is yet another factor, tearing apart our Silk Road. Many lengthy deserts that lay on the silk road depended on the water from glaciers from far-off mountains. In recent years, as the glaciers gradually shrank, so did the trading posts and towns. Although the Silk Road may be heavily disrupted by nature, it all stems from the negligence of us humans. In the end, we are the ones burning our own precious Silk Road.

Moving onto a social-political aspect, political and cultural tensions also sped up the tearing of our Silk Road. Wars and conflicts between countries stop watercourses that reach deserts from being repaired and maintained, this leads to the surrounding sands being encroached and soon burying the sites. Moreover, weak and corrupt states are unable to impose mandatory security measures, granting the appearance of bandits and illicit trades. This discourages merchants from entering such territories, ceasing trades and forms mistrust among countries that oppose the purpose of the Silk Road.

Besides, religion has only acted to exacerbate the current grubby climate, as people grew hostile towards opposing doctrines. The Silk Road, once created to share religion and culture, now no longer serves this role in fear of enlarging the cracks between different religions that very frequently cause wars among countries and rivaling parties. This instability frightens merchants and chases them away from the silk road who seek other industries instead to ensure their own safety. The constant piercing fear among different blocs and individuals only act to slice the fragile silk of trust, drawing the inevitable tear closer.

The Silk Road that was once hope for the world, now becomes a falling star, plunging down as it is burnt by our mistakes and the continuation of time. Our once vibrant and bustling Silk Road is now piled with sand and dust, the sole remaining noise being the chilling winds that blow on the vast, dry desert. Will humanity weave the fragile silk back together, or pick up the scissors and cut it apart for good? Perhaps it is time for a new Silk Road. One that isn't as brittle as silk, one that isn't as flammable as silk, and one that doesn't age like silk. One that can last for as long as mankind progresses. Perhaps the Internet might be the beginning of it.

# The New Silk Road: Connecting the World in a Modern Era

*Heep Yunn School, Lee, Yee Wa Grace – 12*

The Silk Road was one of the most important trade routes in history. It started about 2,000 years ago and connected China with the Middle East, Europe, and Africa. Traders used this route to exchange silk, spices, gold, and other valuable goods. Besides trading goods, the Silk Road also helped spread ideas, religions, and technology between different civilizations. This route played a big role in making different cultures known to each other and helped civilizations grow stronger through trade and cultural exchange.

Today, many people are talking about reviving the Silk Road in a new way, called the "New Silk Road" or the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). This project was launched by China in 2013. Unlike the old Silk Road, which was mainly about trading goods over land and sea, the new Silk Road focuses on creating connections between countries through infrastructure, technology, and cooperation. Its goal is to promote economic growth and development across Asia, Africa, Europe, and other parts of the world.

One of the main aims of the New Silk Road is to improve transportation and infrastructure. Countries involved in the project are building roads, railways, ports, and energy pipelines. These developments make it easier and cheaper to move goods and people. For example, the China–Laos railway reduces travel time between the two countries and encourages more trade and tourism. Another project, the Gwadar port in Pakistan, creates a new maritime route connecting China to Africa and the Middle East via the Indian Ocean.

Besides infrastructure, the New Silk Road also encourages countries to work together economically. Many nations see these projects as opportunities to develop their economies, create jobs, and improve living standards. For example, China invests in African countries' mining, farming, and manufacturing industries, which helps boost their economies. Similarly, countries like Sri Lanka and Bangladesh benefit from better transportation and trade facilities.

Technology and cultural exchange are also important parts of the initiative. Digital projects like internet networks and smart city developments help bridge the digital gap between countries. Educational programs, scholarships, and cultural festivals promote mutual understanding and respect among different peoples. These efforts help build strong ties and foster cooperation for a better future.

Environmental sustainability is becoming more important in the New Silk Road. Many projects now include green energy sources such as solar, wind, and hydroelectric power. Countries are working together to develop renewable energy, which is essential for fighting climate change and reducing pollution. For instance, China has invested heavily in solar farms in Africa, supporting both clean energy and economic growth.

The New Silk Road also benefits small and medium-sized businesses. These businesses can access new markets and participate in global trade, which helps reduce poverty and promote economic equality. It gives entrepreneurs opportunities to grow and succeed in their countries.

However, there are challenges and concerns. Some critics worry that poorer countries might become heavily in debt or that the project could lead to political tensions. It is important for participating countries to be transparent and fair, ensuring that all nations share the benefits equally and that local communities are protected.

Looking ahead, the New Silk Road has the potential to reshape the global economy and create a more connected world. By focusing on infrastructure, economic cooperation, cultural exchanges, and environmental care, it can help build a sustainable and peaceful future. Like the original Silk Road, the modern version aims to bring people and nations closer together—this time, with a focus on shared progress and development.

All in all, the New Silk Road is more than just roads and ports. It symbolizes a new era of global friendship and cooperation. If countries work together with honesty and respect, this project can help create a brighter future for all.

# New Tales of China's Silk Road

*HKUGA College, Kwong, Suet Yee – 14*

We time and again catch the term 'Silk Road', sometimes during Chinese History lessons, watching documentaries, reading articles... Yet do we really know what this term concedes and acknowledge its historical prominence?

We are often misled by its denomination—'the Silk Road'. In fact, the Silk Road is not a road, nor a single paved route. Despite the fact that it no longer exists, it was a tracery of trade corridors connecting the East and the West across both land and seas. These paths reach the length of over 6400 kilometres from China to the Middle East. The Silk Road facilitated the trading of luxury items, such as silk, porcelain, tea and paper from China for merchandise like glass and gold from the West, spices, exotic animals trading of other innovations is also unexceptional.

The Silk Road was discovered and firstly used in 130 B.C.E due to the opened trade of Han Dynasty of China, and came to an end in 1453 C.E when the Ottoman Empire closed off trade with the West. It was used by traders for more than 1500 years. It mostly facilitated exchange between periods of powerful dynasties of China, like the Han and Tang. Its closure did not erase its legacy as it laid the paramount groundwork for our modern society.

The modern term 'The Silk Road', alias 'Silk Routes' was a metaphor to express the routes in terms of the trade of silk textiles, as silk was one of the most valuable and costly goods traded along the network of routes. The term also describes the well-traveled pathway of imports and exports between East Asia and Europe. This expression was first used by a German geographer and traveler Ferdinand von Richthofen in 1877 C.E 20–21.

Some prominent travellers of the Silk Road that we frequently hear of include Zhang Qian and Marco Polo. Zhang Qian, considered 'Father of the Silk Road', was sent on his first commission to form a military alliance with the distant Yuezhi people. He uncovered the sophisticated civilizations and products of Central Asia along his journey. With his detailed report to the Han court, he was sent on his second mission, this time to develop ties with the Wusun people. This mission established economic communication, leading to significant trading of goods, along with technologies, and ideas. Zhang Qian's detailed reports to the Han court demonstrated the possibility of valuable commercial opportunities, especially for Chinese silk, leading the Chinese to secure the routes militarily and start systematic trade and diplomatic missions. A common misconception is that people generally believe that Zhang Qian 'discovered' the Silk Road. However, this concept is erroneous in view of the fact that he didn't discover the single path but rather opened up the vital trade routes by his missions to Central Asia. Another well known traveler of the Silk Road, is Marco Polo. He was born in a family of wealthy merchants in Venice, Italy in 1254 C.E.. He journeyed from Venice to China, with his father and uncle at only the age of 17. They traveled for over 3 years before arriving at Kublai Khan's palace at Xanadu. Marco Polo stayed on at Khan's court as a trusted advisor and official and was sent on missions to parts of Asia unvisited by Europeans before. Marco Polo journaled his discoveries and adventures, providing Europeans with their first detailed accounts of the East through his book, *The Travels of Marco Polo*. The book, otherwise known as *Il Milione*, made him, and the routes he traveled famous by revealing the East's wealth and wonders to curious Europeans. His book also became a sensation, inspiring other explorers like Columbus, who carried a copy of his book. His exploration of the Silk Road boosted cultural exchange, introducing merchandise to Europeans that were unknown previously, and fuelling European desire for Eastern trade. This led to an increasing quantity of trade goods on the Silk Road.

Everyone knows that the Silk Road's existence made a huge impact on our modern trade society, but have we wondered the reason behind? Apart from trading and exchanging goods, intangible exchanges such as religions and ideas also spread along the Silk Road fluently and freely. The Age of Exploration gave rise to faster trade routes between the East and the West, but parts of the Silk Road continued to be critical pathways among varied cultures. We can understand the importance of the Silk Road by just knowing parts of the Silk Road are listed on UNESCO's World Heritage List today. Some of the towns along the route grew into multicultural cities, including Xi'an located in China and other examples like Samarkand and Bukhara in Uzbekistan, these cities became diverse cultures as they were essential rest spots and trading centers and meeting points of traders from diverse regions. The exchange and flow of information also gave rise to new technologies and innovations that changed the world and history. For example, the horses introduced to China contributed to the power of the Mongol Empire, and

gunpowder from China changed the very nature of war in Europe and beyond. Aside from all these world changing information that spread to different regions through the Silk Road, diseases also spread. The Black Death, one of history's deadliest pandemics, spread from Asia along the Silk Road to Europe in the late 1340s C.E., and killed an estimated two-thirds of Europe's population.

In conclusion, the vast network of trade routes together wove the history of trading between the East and the West for over 15 centuries. Its name coined in the 19th century does not only highlight the iconic flow of silk and goods, its true historical prominence lies in its role as the world's first great internet—a foundational system for the trading of goods, ideas, technologies, and beliefs. From the missions of Zhang Qian to the evocative tales of Marco Polo, this trading system transformed isolated societies to multicultural cities, fostering tangible and intangible trade, making huge and world changing impacts in both history and modern societies. The ability to exchange caused religions, information, and even diseases to flow across the Silk Road, shaping human history through connections of various cities and regions. The enduring presence of the Silk Road sites on UNESCO reminds us that before all of the advanced information and technology in our modern and globalised world, it was the Silk Road that brought the world closer together through trade and exchange.

# Religion Exchange and The Development of The Belt and Road Initiative

*Immaculate Heart of Mary College, Au-Yeung, Ming Chi – 14*

The ancient Silk Road originated over two thousand years ago, yet its spirit of connectivity persists even today. This legendary network played a pivotal role throughout history, facilitating not only extensive trade but also profound cultural exchanges among diverse civilizations. As a devout Catholic, I find myself particularly drawn to the fascinating exchanges of religious ideas that occurred along these routes. Among the many figures who embodied this cross-cultural dialogue, Matteo Ricci stands out as an undoubtedly important icon in the history of interactions between East and West.

Matteo Ricci was born on October 6, 1552, in Macerata, Italy. He joined the Jesuit order in 1571, and by 1577, he entered the Society of Jesus alongside four fellow students. In September 1578, they first traveled to Goa, a Portuguese colony in India, where Ricci dedicated himself to teaching and ministerial work until the end of Lent in 1582. At that point, he received a summons to Macau to prepare for his entry into mainland China. His journey into China truly began when he arrived in Macau in early August 1582.

During his youth, Ricci's father had hoped he would pursue a career in law, as he was the eldest son and expected to provide substantial financial support for the family. However, from childhood, Ricci had already felt a strong calling to become a Jesuit. Having studied at a Jesuit school in his early years, he viewed joining the order as a profoundly fulfilling path. Despite his father's warnings, he pursued this vocation and was admitted to the Jesuits in 1577. Eventually, his elder brother also became a priest. Over time, his father came to accept that this might indeed be the divine purpose God intended for Ricci. Ricci devoted most of his adult life to spreading Catholicism in China. In 1601, accompanied by the scholar Xu Guangqi, he traveled to Beijing to meet Emperor Shenzong of the Ming dynasty. Although they were unable to secure a direct audience with the emperor after waiting four months, the emperor granted Ricci imperial patronage, providing a generous stipend and supporting his work on the *Zhifang Waiji*, which became China's first comprehensive global atlas.

The Silk Road did not merely introduce Western religions to the East; it also enabled Eastern religions to spread westward, most notably Buddhism. Buddhism holds deep significance for Chinese culture. During the Tang dynasty, the monk Tang Sanzang journeyed to India to retrieve sacred Buddhist scriptures, an epic endeavour that later inspired the renowned novel *Journey to the West*. This legendary tale is rooted in Tang Sanzang's real historical mission to acquire these scriptures. In addition, Confucianism represents another signature philosophical and ethical tradition of China, founded by the great thinker Confucius. Confucianism shares certain parallels with Catholicism, particularly in its emphasis on reverence for the divine and moral order. Ricci himself translated key Confucian texts, including *The Four Books*, into Latin, demonstrating his respect for Chinese thought. For this reason, I firmly believe that Confucianism can harmoniously integrate with Catholic teachings.

During the era of the ancient Silk Road, religious exchanges illustrated how the East and the West could openly share and learn from each other's ideas. Moreover, these interactions taught the importance of respecting other religions and beliefs. In the modern context, what role does the "New Silk Road" play in continuing this legacy?

The Belt and Road Initiative, known in China as "One Belt One Road" or the New Silk Road, is a comprehensive global infrastructure and economic development strategy launched by the People's Republic of China in 2013. Beyond promoting trade, it facilitates the exchange of diverse ideas among participating countries, encompassing fields such as arts, science, religion, and more.

Since its inception in 2013, the Belt and Road Initiative has now spanned over a decade. What began as an ambitious concept and draft proposal has evolved into a tangible reality with widespread impact. As an ideal framework for collaborative development, the initiative's infrastructure projects demonstrate how China leverages the spirit of the Silk Road to foster mutual growth with countries worldwide. This approach delivers effective development outcomes across various nations and brings concrete benefits to people's livelihoods. Within the Belt and Road Initiative's framework, what specific position does Hong Kong occupy?

According to *Our China Story*, in 2017, the Hong Kong Government and the National Development and Reform Commission signed the "Arrangements Supporting Hong Kong's Full Participation in and Contribution to the Belt and Road Initiative." This agreement outlined six main areas of focus: emphasizing finance and investment, developing infrastructure and shipping services, enhancing financial communication and cooperation, promoting people-to-people connectivity, and strengthening cooperation in legal and dispute resolution services.

In September 2022, during the 7th Belt and Road Summit Forum, Han Zheng, then Vice Premier of the State Council, presented "four hopes" for Hong Kong, providing clear direction for its future contributions. First, Hong Kong should continue expanding international ties and promoting more pragmatic cooperation with countries and regions along the Belt and Road routes—for instance, by establishing 14 economic and trade offices in the Asia-Pacific, Middle East, Europe, North America, and other areas, while actively pursuing accession to the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP). Second, it should strengthen professional services in fields such as legal, shipping, financial, and consulting sectors to build a comprehensive service platform for the Belt and Road. Third, it should enhance cultural exchanges to foster closer bonds among peoples along the routes, exemplified by the Hong Kong government's "Belt and Road" scholarship program. Fourth, it should deepen collaboration with the mainland and integrate more actively into the broader national development landscape.

Today, I believe Hong Kong has emerged as a vital bridge between East and West, much like the missionaries of old who introduced new knowledge to various countries, including China. In our contemporary world, global warming poses a severe threat to the planet. According to *Our China Story*, the Nano-Confined Catalytic Oxidation (NCCO) technology was developed by the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology. After Cathy Tsim, an academician associated with the university, joined RHT Industries Limited, she actively promoted this innovative air purification technology to industrial, medical, and retail sectors. Seizing opportunities presented by the Belt and Road Initiative, Cathy expanded its reach to 18 countries and regions, including Thailand and Singapore. She maintains that the initiative has significantly increased business prospects, and with supportive policies from China, Hong Kong can position itself as a technological hub, forging strong connections with the mainland and global partners for powerful collaborative outcomes.

Clearly, Hong Kong primarily serves as an international connector and professional service platform in the joint construction of the Belt and Road Initiative, thereby generating fresh development opportunities for the city.

As a leading international legal and dispute resolution center in the Asia-Pacific region, Hong Kong's common law system offers considerable advantages and enjoys widespread international recognition. Consequently, many transnational contracts opt for Hong Kong law as the governing law. Nevertheless, as an integral part of China, Hong Kong maintains its distinct legal and economic systems, creating a fair and competitive environment for both local and foreign enterprises. This unique position enables it to function effectively as a bridge linking China with the global community.

In recent years, one aspect worthy of admiration is China's assistance to many less-developed countries in constructing infrastructure. For example, China supported Laos in building the China-Laos Kunming-Vientiane Railway, which connects the two nations. Before construction began, Chinese companies and Lao professors conducted thorough environmental assessments and implemented strict ecological protection measures. As a result, the railway became an environmentally friendly project and a model for promoting green ecology in Laos. I view this as a promising beginning for China to engage globally and help least-developed countries build sustainable, eco-conscious infrastructure.

On the other hand, Hong Kong operates as a highly open and free market economy. It has long served as an international financial and trading center and ranks among the world's freest economies, often placing seventh globally in such assessments. Hong Kong has developed profound strengths in trade and investment. Consequently, talents, capital, goods, and information flow freely within its borders. At the same time, as the world's largest offshore RMB business hub, Hong Kong provides essential financing, RMB settlement, and investment services for relevant economies along the routes.

International infrastructure projects under the Belt and Road enhance convenient transportation and communication networks for Hong Kong, solidifying its status as a premier international shipping and logistics center. As one of the world's busiest airports for both cargo and passengers, Hong Kong International Airport offers flights to approximately 220 destinations worldwide, covering nearly half the global population within a five-hour

flight radius. Hong Kong also ranks among the top ten ports globally. In 2021, the port handled nearly 18 million standard containers, with around 270 international container liners connecting to nearly 600 destinations around the world each week.

I believe the Silk Road has always served as a crucial bridge between East and West, enabling us to acquire valuable knowledge from Western civilizations while allowing Westerners to appreciate and learn from Asian cultures. This network endured for roughly a thousand years until the mid-15th century. Even after its overland decline, exchanges continued via maritime routes, as Westerners persisted in sailing to the Far East despite numerous hardships. In the present day, Hong Kong not only exports goods and services but also actively absorbs Western knowledge, much as Matteo Ricci once absorbed Chinese wisdom and contributed to future generations through his efforts.

# 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.

# The New Tales of China's Silk Road

*Immaculate Heart of Mary College, Ng, Yuen Yui – 13*

My name is Ali Bakr al-Siddig. I am a twelve-year-old boy, and I have lived with my family in the commercial city of Mecca since my birth. My father is a successful merchant fluent in multiple languages—he is my hero! He travels to different cities and conducts business with people from various countries, sharing fascinating stories about them.

Last month, due to years of social and economic boycotts imposed by our enemies, we secretly departed from Mecca for Medina, following our great leader. However, Medina is not entirely safe. Last week, my father made an important decision: he wishes to lead our camel caravan, along with our family, on a journey to Chang'an (which we usually call Khumdan), the capital of the Tang Empire, the most prosperous empire in the world. He hopes to continue his business in that thriving city, securing our family's future.

My father tells me this journey will be long, lasting almost a year. We will pass through cities such as Damascus, Ctesiphon, Ecbatana, Khasagar, and Dunhuang before finally reaching Chang'an, the world's most populous city. Though I have never been there, my father's vivid stories of this bustling capital have painted its image in my mind for years. Now, I can hardly believe I'll actually walk its streets.

We say goodbye to our great leader and embark on our new journey. After about 40 days of travel, we arrive in Damascus, our first destination. This wealthy and prosperous city, part of the Byzantine Empire, is recovering from a long war between the Byzantine and Sassanian Empires. As a vital stop on major trade routes, its markets overflow with goods from distant lands, including silk, glass, and spices. At one stall, we discover a mysterious black liquid; the stall owner tells us it burns for a long time. My father believes it will be useful in our journey, so we purchase a bottle. Our caravan will stay in Damascus for three days.

A strange occurrence happens the following night. As I gaze at the night sky from our balcony, admiring the bright moon and stars, I suddenly see a carpet flying through the air with a person sitting on it. The next day, I mention it to my father, but he just laughs, suggesting I must have been too tired.

Three days later, our caravan begins our journey early in the morning. We travel along the Euphrates River, enjoying the stunning views—it is quite relaxing. The river is wide and shallow, lined with tamarisk trees and poplars. After another 40 days, we arrive at Ctesiphon, the capital of the Sassanian Empire.

Because of the ongoing conflicts between the Byzantine and Sassanian Empires, the guards search us upon learning we are from Damascus before allowing us entry. Ctesiphon is a magnificent and affluent city, located on the Tigris River and a key node on major trade routes. Similar to Damascus, its markets are bustling with goods from various nations. The palace of the Sassanian Empire, known as Taq Kasra, can be easily recognized by its impressive arched hall—often referred to as the Arch of Ctesiphon.

After leaving Ctesiphon, our caravan proceeds to Ecbatana, a journey that takes about 15 days. The latter part involves crossing mountains, requiring us to navigate winding passes and valleys, a stark contrast to the flat plains we traversed earlier.

Upon entering the Tang Empire, we encounter a massive mountain engulfed in eternal flames. Villagers tell us that the only way to extinguish the fire is with a magical Palm-Leaf Fan. Suddenly, a monkey dressed like a human appears, wielding a large fan that extinguishes the raging fire in an instant. My father later learns that it is a monk from the Tang Empire, accompanied by three disciples who helped put out the fire. We are incredibly fortunate; without their intervention, we might have been trapped by the flames and unable to continue. As they are heading to India, we hope they reach their destination safely.

Ten months after departing Medina, we arrive in Dunhuang, a vital logistical and military base of the Tang Empire. As the gateway on the major trade routes, all caravans are funneled through this city. Our caravan stays in Dunhuang for about a week. During our stay, we visit the Mogao Caves (also known as the Caves of a Thousand

Buddhas) to admire the many forms of Buddhist art, including sculptures, wall paintings, silk paintings, woodblock prints, and embroidery. My father donates some gold to the local monks to support the construction of the caves, hoping to pray for our safety and establish a reputation for our caravan in the region. After attending to necessary affairs in Dunhuang, we continue our journey and finally reach Chang'an two months later.

Chang'an! It is the most magnificent capital I have ever seen! The main street is incredibly wide, and the city is divided into walled residential and commercial blocks. As the eastern terminus of major trade routes, Chang'an's markets are filled with goods and people from diverse countries—Sogdian traders, Persian artisans, and Indian monks among them. This constant flow of individuals creates a vibrant melting pot of cultures, languages, religions, and ideas. In the north-central part of the city stands an impressive imperial palace. Chang'an is not just a hub of power and commerce; it is a cultural capital. Its elite and literate class compose poetry and enjoy music, dance, and art from various lands. The sophisticated culture of the Tang Empire sets standards for fashion, etiquette, and taste that are emulated throughout neighboring countries.

Afterward, our family settles in Chang'an and establishes a business trading silk, porcelain, and handicrafts. We also utilize our caravan to bring specialties from our homeland and other cities along the trade routes to sell in Chang'an. As our wealth steadily grows, we witness the development and rise of the Tang Empire.

# Cultural Crossroads: The Silk Road's Legacy

*International Christian School, Chan, Charlyne Sze Ki – 13*

Picture a world where the brightest minds and rich cultures intermingled, all linked by a vast network of trade routes stretching for thousands of miles. What if the foundation of our modern society had roots in these ancient exchanges? The Silk Road, often viewed as just a route for caravans and traders, played a crucial role in shaping civilizations through the sharing of ideas and cultural practices. This essay looks into how the Silk Road acted as an essential channel for cultural exchange, deeply influencing art, religion, and philosophy across different regions.

The Silk Road began during the Han Dynasty, especially through the efforts of envoy Zhang Qian, who is known for organizing the trade routes connecting the East and West. These routes built upon earlier networks established by Persian traders and influenced by the conquests of Alexander the Great, which encouraged interactions between different cultures long before the term "Silk Road" was even used. The creation of these routes allowed not just the movement of goods but also the sharing of ideas and people, setting the stage for a rich cultural environment. The improved infrastructure developed during the Tang Dynasty enhanced this network further, as Tang rulers put policies in place to upgrade roads, create relay stations, and implement laws that looked out for merchants. These changes made the exchange of goods and ideas safer and more efficient over large distances. The capital, Chang'an, became a major center for traders, travelers, and scholars, drawing in items like silk, spices, and precious metals, along with a mix of religious beliefs and philosophies from across Eurasia.

One significant impact of the Silk Road was its influence on the spread of Buddhism from India to China. Monks and traders shared Buddhist teachings along the trade routes and set up monasteries in key places like Dunhuang, which became important spots for cultural interaction. These monasteries often served as rest areas where travelers could relax and exchange knowledge, helping to spread ideas even further. The arrival of Mahayana Buddhism greatly altered Chinese beliefs, affecting prominent figures such as Emperor Wu of the Liang Dynasty, who incorporated Buddhist ideas into his governance. This change also resonated in the arts, leading to new artistic forms that depicted Buddhas, bodhisattvas, and mandalas. Architectural advancements were evident in cave temples like those at Yungang and Longmen, showcasing styles focused on capturing spiritual meaning and often inspired by Zen concepts of emptiness and natural flow. These temples not only served religious functions but also became vital stores of cultural history, keeping texts and artifacts that represented a mix of various influences.

Furthermore, the spread of Islam through Central Asia was driven by trade connections and military interactions. As Islam became the main religion in many areas, a rich tradition of learning, scientific exploration, and philosophical discussions was created that affected different parts of the Asia-Pacific. Important progress includes the introduction of the Arabic numeral system, which made math calculations simpler and assisted in the development of algebra. Noteworthy scholars from the Islamic world, like Al-Khwarizmi and Ibn Sina (Avicenna), made key contributions to math and medicine that were shared along these trade routes. Additionally, Islamic scholars helped keep Greek texts alive, ensuring that vital philosophical and scientific knowledge was passed on to Europe during a later time known as the Renaissance. The establishment of schools, known as madrasas, helped maintain and share knowledge through generations, encouraging a spirit of learning and discussion among various groups.

The Silk Road also enabled widespread artistic exchanges, merging Hellenistic, Indian, Persian, and Chinese artistic styles. For example, this blending can be seen in Greco-Buddhist art, showcasing common themes such as drapery and iconography. Craftspeople along the Silk Road used diverse materials and styles, leading to inventive practices like the production of Chinese porcelain, which became highly valued in global markets. Notable examples of combined artistic forms include the Gandhara art movement, which fused Greek and Indian influences into Buddhist visuals, and Sogdian art, which mixed local Iranian styles with elements from Hellenistic, Indian, and Chinese cultures. The merging of these artistic techniques not only created unique visual styles but also highlighted the cultural exchanges that took place along the Silk Road.

The sharing of literature and philosophy was another essential aspect of the Silk Road's legacy. Scholars

and monks translated religious and philosophical texts into different languages, allowing their ideas to reach a wider audience and sparking intellectual conversations among various cultures. This exchange contributed significantly to the spread of Buddhism but also supported the growth of other religions, including Zoroastrianism, Christianity, and Manichaeism. Texts like the "Heart Sutra" and the "Tao Te Ching" played important roles in shaping religious beliefs across Asia. During the Tang Dynasty, translations such as the "Diamond Sutra" made these works accessible to Chinese communities, which helped further cement Buddhism's influence on Chinese philosophy.

The legacy of the Silk Road goes beyond just the exchange of silk and spices; it symbolizes a deep interconnectedness that helped pave the way for globalization as we know it today. This network encouraged more than just economic trade; it also created an intricate mix of cultural interactions that formed the identities of the cultures it linked. As ideas and artistic expressions traveled along these routes, they produced a shared cultural legacy that crossed borders and impacted everything from cooking traditions to architecture. For instance, introducing new agricultural technologies and crops—like cotton and citrus fruits—has had lasting effects on local economies and diets, enriching societies everywhere. The diplomatic ties created through these interactions demonstrated the importance of collaboration and mutual respect, principles that remain crucial in today's global relationships. In the end, the Silk Road stands as a reminder of our collective human journey and the significance of embracing cultural diversity, inspiring future generations to tackle the challenges and opportunities of our interconnected world.

In conclusion, we can learn important lessons from the historical exchanges that took place along the Silk Road, particularly about the significant effect of cultural sharing and the need for understanding in a growing global community. The story of the Silk Road shows us that the blending of ideas, religions, and artistic styles, also known as cultural syncretism, can change societies and leave legacies that go beyond material goods. Additionally, the success of trade hubs in promoting an atmosphere of acceptance and teamwork highlights the essential role of cultural diplomacy in fostering sustainable innovation in our interconnected world today. Understanding different cultures serves as a key foundation for addressing challenges like climate change and organizing worldwide business efforts, where collaboration is vital.

Ultimately, the Silk Road stands as a powerful example of the lasting impact of communication and exchange between cultures. As a network of not just trade routes but also ideas, it illustrates how different cultures can connect, adapt, and flourish together. The influences of Buddhism, Islam, and various artistic movements remind us that the meeting of different civilizations can bring about significant changes that shape societies over time. As we work our way through the complexities of our modern global landscape, the lessons derived from the Silk Road urge us to welcome cultural diversity and respect each other. In an increasingly interlinked world, the spirit of cooperation and understanding that characterized the Silk Road remains essential, inspiring us to create our own stories of connection and teamwork as we confront today's shared challenges.

# The Silk Road: How Ancient Connection Shapes Our World

*International Christian School, Hui, Nicolas – 12*

## **Introduction: The World’s First “Global Highway” That Shaped History**

The Silk Road wasn’t just a bunch of roads – it was a huge network of trade paths that linked Asia, Africa, and Europe for over 1,700 years! Stretching thousands of miles, from China’s old capitals to Rome’s busy markets, India’s colorful spice shops to Persia’s grand palaces, this busy web didn’t just trade silk, gold, or tea. It also shared ideas, religions, tools, and cultures – stuff that changed human history forever. It got started around 114 BCE because China’s Han Dynasty wanted to make diplomatic ties with other lands, and it thrived as a super important connection between distant civilizations until the 1600s. Even now, its legacy is strong, showing just how big its impact was on the world.

## **How It Began: Zhang Qian’s Epic Journey & the “Gold of the East”**

Contrary to what people think, the Silk Road was never one single road. It was a sprawling mix of land and sea paths that grew and changed over hundreds of years. Its story begins with China’s Han Dynasty wanting to feel safer from hostiles. In 138 BCE, Emperor Wu sent a man named Zhang Qian to Central Asia to team up with a group called the Yuezhi, hoping they could together fight against the Xiongnu nomads. Zhang Qian got captured twice and stuck in Central Asia for over 10 years, but when he finally made his way back to China, he brought stories about faraway lands, strange and exotic goods, and people China could trade with. He also mapped out key routes through big mountain ranges like the Pamirs, the vast Gobi Desert, and the Iranian Plateau, laying the foundation for what would become the Silk Road. The network got its name from its most famous product: Chinese silk. China kept how to make silk a secret for centuries, and this soft, fancy fabric was as valuable as gold in the West. In Rome, silk was so expensive it cost its weight in gold—emperors wore silk robes to show they were “divine,” and rich people used silk tapestries to decorate their homes. But silk wasn’t the only thing traded along the routes. Persia, which is modern-day Iran, sent gold, silver, and fine cloth. India sold all kinds of spices like pepper, cinnamon, and cardamom, along with cotton and shiny gems. Rome traded glassware, wool, and sweet fruits from the Mediterranean. Africa sent ivory, fragrant incense, and slaves. Even everyday stuff like grain, tools, and pottery traveled across continents, connecting people’s daily lives in ways they might not have even realized.

## **Empires: The Unsung Heroes of Silk Road Success**

Powerful empires played a big part in helping the Silk Road grow by keeping things stable and building useful infrastructure. The Han Dynasty built roads, inns for travelers, and posts to protect traders. The Parthian Empire acted as a middleman, controlling the flow of trade between China and Rome. Later, in the 1200s, the Mongol Empire took over much of Eurasia and created what’s called the Pax Mongolia, a time when travel along the Silk Road was surprisingly safe. Mongol rulers lowered taxes for traders, made weights and measures the same everywhere so people wouldn’t scam each other, and built rest stops. This was the Silk Road’s golden age, when caravans with hundreds of camels crossed long distances, and merchants from all over gathered in busy cities like Samarkand, Bukhara, and Dunhuang to buy and sell goods.

## **Paths of Adventure: Routes and the Perils of the Journey**

The Silk Road had lots of different routes, each used for different purposes. Three main overland paths stood out. The Northern Route stretched from Chang’an, which is modern Xi’an, through the Gobi Desert and the Tian Shan Mountains. Its flat terrain made it perfect for caravans carrying silk. The Southern Route went through the Tibetan Plateau and the foothills of the Himalayas, mostly used for trading spices—carrying cinnamon from Sri Lanka, pepper from India, and cloves from Indonesia to China and the Middle East. The Western Route linked Persia to the Mediterranean, sending silk, gems, and metals all the way to Rome. But soon, maritime Silk Roads popped up too. Ships from Chinese ports like Guangzhou sailed to Southeast Asia, India, and East Africa, trading silk, delicate porcelain, and tea for spices, ivory, and tropical wood. Traveling the Silk Road was tough, no matter which route you took. Merchants faced extreme weather; scorching days in the desert and freezing cold nights. Bandits were a constant threat, looking to steal valuable cargo. To survive, travelers used the stars to navigate at night, packed dried food that wouldn’t spoil on long trips, and relied on camels, which can go days without water. Most people traveled in big caravans with armed guards, but even then, a single trip could take months or even

years. Although the journey would be dangerous, it was all worth it for the huge profits they could make by selling rare goods in faraway lands.

### **Cultural Exchange: The Silk Road's Greatest Gift**

But the Silk Road's biggest impact was from the cultural exchange that happened between people of different civilizations. Religions spread rapidly along the routes. Buddhism started in India and traveled north to Central Asia and China, where it became a major religion. Buddhist monks—built monasteries and temples, whose colorful frescoes mix Indian, Central Asian, and Chinese art styles in beautiful, unique ways. Islam spread eastward through Arab traders and missionaries, reaching Central Asia, India, and parts of China. Knowledge and technology flowed freely between East and West. China's paper-making, printing, and gunpowder revolutionized education and warfare in the West—paper was much cheaper than parchment or papyrus, so keeping records and making books got way easier. In return, Greek and Persian scholars shared important knowledge like geometry and astronomy, while Indian doctors taught Chinese doctors about herbal remedies and new surgical techniques. Useful skills like building irrigation systems, metalworking, and textile techniques spread too, boosting agricultural yields and making people's living standards better. Culinary traditions mixed as well—spices from Asia changed the way people cooked in Europe and China, making food more flavorful, while Chinese noodles and tea became popular in Central Asia. Politically, the Silk Road led to lots of alliances between different rulers. Leaders signed treaties to protect caravans and lower taxes for traders. Ambassadors, scholars, and artists traveled along with merchants, exchanging gifts and ideas. Sometimes, royal marriages sealed political connections, ensuring that trade could continue safely for years to come.

### **Historical Legacy: Decline and Transformations**

The Silk Road is incredible as it's living proof of our human grit—curious, tough, and always ready to collaborate! It was one of history's earliest instances of diverse civilizations, with distinct languages, religions, and customs, cooperating for mutual benefit. Two thousand years ago, it forged global interconnectedness and laid the groundwork for modern trade, turning everyday goods like spices, silk, tea, and cotton into the world's first global commodities. Culturally, it sparked a fusion of styles, from Buddhist caves to Islamic mosques, leaving an indelible mark on art and architecture.

By the 1500s, however, the Silk Road began to decline. Maritime routes emerged as faster, safer, and cheaper alternatives, with ships carrying far more cargo than caravans while avoiding desert hazards and bandits. The fall of the Mongol Empire ended the stable Pax Mongolica, Central Asia fragmented into warring states, and conflicts like the Ottoman–Safavid wars disrupted land travel. Europe's rising power shifted trade to the Atlantic, while China's Ming Dynasty's isolationist policies further severed ties. By the 1600s, the once-thriving network had largely faded into obscurity.

### **Conclusion: How the Silk Road Wove the World**

The Silk Road was way more than just a trade network—it was a big factor for human progress. For over 1,700 years, it bridged East and West, letting goods, ideas, religions, and cultures flow freely between different civilizations. The hardships that travelers endured show how tough and curious people were, and how far they were willing to go to connect with others. Today, even in our modern world, it's amazing to trace our global links back to this 2,000-year-old network of paths. The Silk Road teaches us that collaboration and exchange are key to human success, proving that when different cultures connect, they build prosperity and understanding together. Even though it's no longer a primary trade route, its legacy lives on, still being a great story of adventure, resilience, and connection.

# Silk Road

*Kellett School, Hong Kong, Barnard, Henry – Y7*

Hundreds of years ago there was once a boy named Marco and when he was at the age of 4 he wanted to travel along the Silk Road. More than a decade later, when he was 15, he was a master at riding horses and taming them. So, he brought his best horse and travelled to China. When he reached China he was surrounded by the tranquil environment with the lush green terrain filled with bamboo and lofty mountains.

Marco had a goal whilst he was in China. He wanted to sell his strong bulky and powerful horse for a hefty amount of money so he could buy other goods. After days of being in the humid environment he stumbled across a tribe wearing chest plates, helmets and leggings with a pattern of a dragon, and they needed horses. “We will give you one gold bar and some rice for that powerful horse of yours” said the leader of the tribe. “Yes”, said Marco, whilst letting his horse go into the hands of the tribe. As they said, they laid the pristine gold bar in his small hand and put the rice on the donkey. Then he left the village to continue his travels.

He went deeper into the bamboo forest hoping to find a village. He passed through pure lakes that were matching the vibrant colours of the forest with its picturesque scenery. He stumbled across a village unlike the other one, this was a bit chilly. They made silk but had an unbelievably bad harvest and the people were starving, so they offered to exchange Marcos's rice and a little gold for some silk. Marco agreed and continued on his journey.

He came down from the stunning hills to a town on the edge of the desert. The scorching sun shone right above him, and the air was hot and humid. Then in the distance he found a group of men with lots of camels and traded the donkey and a little more gold for one of the camels which towered over him. He joined a caravan travelling west. The camel was bad-tempered and difficult to ride.

In the hills north of India they were attacked by bandits. Marco fought bravely with a Mongolian bow he carried with him from the beginning of the journey. He saved the life of an Indian prince who was travelling with them on the caravan. When they got to the prince's kingdom Marco was rewarded with expensive and luxurious jewels and unique spices.

He stayed for some months with the prince and learned about their religion, which believed in many gods. He also learned about the teachings of Buddha.

When he left, he traveled north and saw the magnificent, blue-domed mosques of Central Asia. He traveled to Afghanistan where he bought a lot of Lapis lazuli with its beautiful blue colour.

By the time he came to Persia he had 12 camels of his own. He saw the city of Isfahan with its beautiful mosques and huge main square. He enjoyed the delicious fresh fruits that grow in that country. Having learned some of their language he eventually left in a large caravan with a big armed escort for Constantinople. He saw the magnificent Hagia Sophia and the huge city walls which had kept the city safe for hundreds of years. He sold some of his silk and made a big profit.

From Constantinople he took a ship which stopped in Athens. Marco saw the Acropolis and wondered about the culture of the ancient Greeks. He bought many large pots of olive oil.

Finally, he arrived home in Venice where he became famous for telling the tales of his travels. People were amazed about the countries he had visited as there were so many diverse cultures and religions.

The spices, jewels, and silk he brought with him meant he was wealthy. He was incredibly happy, but he didn't know that behind him in the Silk Road came a hidden danger... the plague called the Black Death.

The Silk Road remained very prosperous until the Europeans sailed around Africa directly to India and Asia and began taking goods from there by ship back to Europe.

# New Tales of China's Silk Road

*King's College, Jiang, Jeremy – 13*

A long time ago, the Silk Road journey began with the Han people expeditions, they explored around Asia, even Europe, which leads to a enormous network of trading routes between east and west to exchange goods, for example, the people from the west could trade for silk, paper and gunpowder from China. Moreover, along with spices, animals and ideas, the Chinese cultural spread to many countries. This trading route continued from 2<sup>nd</sup> BC until the mid-1400s. This route deeply influenced the whole world.

Why is the trading route called the Silk Road? And who is the first one to discover this? In 2<sup>nd</sup> BC, a Chinese envoy Zhang Qian, was sent by Han Emperor Wu to find the Yuezhi people to form an alliance to fight the Xiongnu to defend their territories. However, during his travel, he was captured and imprisoned for years. After escaped, he explored Central Asia and other civilizations and continued his extraordinary journey before returning to China. In Ferghana Valley near Central Asia, Zhang Qian discovered that the 'heavenly horses' from the valley were stronger than Chinese horses and armies. Therefore, he returned to China and reported the details about the Western and the people there demanded for Chinese silk. Later, the Han emperor was impressed of him and traded beyond China and the countries from the West. This is the story about why the trade route is called Silk Road and the first one to discover the important Silk Road.

Although the Silk Road has ended in mid-1400s, in 2013, the Chinese president Xi Jinping launched the modern Belt and Road Initiative to increase China's economic influence through massive infrastructure investments to the world, like ports, railways and roads across Asia, Africa and Europe. This meant to expand China's economic and geopolitical influence and created new trades, energy and communication corridors to facilitate goods from China and its global position.

Next, the Silk Road benefits the people around the world too as they can learn from each other. For example, with the convenience of transportation, different cultures appeared in other countries, like food, drinks and souvenirs. It helps people to understand more information about their country and broaden their horizons through the China's Silk Road.

In conclusion, The Silk Road has deeply influenced the whole world with their trading routes and skills. Moreover, no matter it's the old Silk Road or the modern one, they still have benefits for people to understand different countries' cultures. For China, China's Silk Road has greatly improved the economy and the military for many years and make China the most productive country in the world. This is why the China's Silk Road is one of the most important to country and human development in the history and the future world.

# The Silk Road

*Korean International School, Choi, Yoon – 12*

## –About the Silk Road

The Silk Road is a trade and exchange system that connected China and the Mediterranean sea and Africa before the Age of Discovery. Through this route, there were many cultures between east and west, and large and small cities were formed everywhere the Silk Road passed. There was a similar international trade between China, Tibet, India, and Nepal called the ancient Tea route.

## –History of the Silk Road

The Silk Road, in a long term, was developed after the end of the ice age around 10000 BC and the Great Migration of Humanity began, as the Silk Road includes multiple routes, it has been functioning as a station for exchanges between civilizations until now.

On the other hand, the Silk Road in a short term, referring to the passage of East–West civilization exchange, was created from the 8th century to 9th century BC and functioned until modern times.

For cities and states in Central Asia and nomadic countries in Eurasia, it was a source of wealth and national power, and they were also very important economically for the countries of West Asia.

## –Main Periods of the Silk Road

The Silk Road can be divided into three main periods;

In 139BC, the early Silk Road, represented by trade between the Han and Rome empires, and the first heyday after Dang dynasty, and the second heyday until the end of the 12th century, when the trade road was stabilized by the conquest of the Mongol empire,

In fact, the early Silk Road, which started with Zhang Qian's westward expedition was not for trade purposes, but to find an alliance to respond to the Xiong Nus and there were exchanges between Rome and the Han, but only indirectly. Trade was possible due to the interference of the Pandian empire.

The trade itself at this time was a total lose to Rome. Rome had nothing to sell to China, and Chinese goods such as silks were extremely popular to citizens in Rome.

In fact, the Silk Road before the Dang dynasty was significant in that it spread religion, especially Buddhism, rather than trade. This is because Buddhism spread beyond India to Asia before and after this period.

## –Heyday of the Silk Road

After that, the Silk Road died for a while, but it was in its prime in the 7th century, when the Dang dynasty was founded. Silk Road's trade continued, culminating in the conquest of the Mongol empire in the early 13th century.

As most routes of the Silk Road were conquered to Mongolian territories, trade routes were secured, and Mongolia, unlike China, established a system that promised free passage protection, and distribution of special passports, making trade more prosperous.

## –Decline of the Silk Road

In the 14th century, Mongol, the owner of the Silk Road declined, and the Black Death devastated countries from Europe to Central Asia, shrinking the commercial activities of the Silk Road.

However, the proportion of the Silk Road began to decrease in the 16th century as Europeans began to develop new routes (Age of Discovery).

The Silk Road has completely declined since the opening of the new route. The in-land trade network was growing and flourished during its heyday as a key trading hub. Since then, it has established bases in the major cities of Central Asia and opened markets to the Caspian sea and the Black sea.

#### **-Modern Silk Road**

Trade between China and Russia has also grown, but due to the deepening of the Great game, central Asia has become part of the Indian region and that experienced a monopoly on trade with maritime trade, Central Asia experienced monopoly on trade like India by trading with Russia and Middle East China through the Trans-Siberian Railway.

Nowadays, China envisions cultural and geopolitical recycling of the legacy of the past Silk Road, but unlike the past Silk Road, which excluded Africa, it was even considered to enter Africa.

Due to China's efforts to revive the Silk Road, 33 ruins on the Silk Road were listed as World Heritage Sites under the name of the Silk Road:Chang'an Tinashan Corridor Road Network.

# The Millennial Silk Road

*Korean International School, Jung, Jiwoo – 12*

More than two millennia ago, the Silk Road played a crucial role in connecting the world from the east to the west. Tea and silk from China, precious metals from Persia, glassware from Rome were all traded on the Silk Road. This made me wonder, what is the significance of the Silk road to our modern lives? The world has changed. It is not like the time when Marco Polo had to travel for three and a half years just to get “a cup of tea” in China. We use an amalgamation of methods to exchange our cultures. In my opinion, OTT (“over-the-top”) is the modern day Silk Road of humankind. OTT refers to the delivery of media content, such as video, audio or even messages all around the world. If the old Silk Road was a way to carry things and culture between countries, OTT is a way to bring us the stories of various countries but digitally. So today, I would like to present my ideas on how we learn about various cultures from OTT smartly.

Nowadays, OTT is so influential because first of all, you can view and share the content of any country such as Korea, Japan, India and Spain in just one click. Which means it is very easy and convenient for us to get to know other cultures as well as sharing your own one! Secondly, subtitles and dubbing are like translators. If there was a translator on the Silk Road, then, OTT contains subtitles and dubbing. Even if all countries have their own distinct language, you can understand the contents and also open the door to learning! Third of all, the recommended function is like a caravan (camel procession). It brings a line of programs that I might enjoy. And thanks to the recommended function, we can easily discover the story of the country for the first time. Lastly, genres are mixed to create new content. For example, a unique work of art is created when a traditional story of one country and the filming and music style of another country meet. It is similar to a new design being produced with a mixture of patterns and technology found on the Silk Road.

However, you can argue that if students and young people watch OTT excessively, they will not have enough time to spend on themselves. It is completely true. That is why we need rules. We can set a time when we can watch OTT and prioritise the more important aspects of life, such as homework and exercise. Some may also claim that the diversity of culture is reduced by only watching the contents from well-known countries. To solve this problem, we can watch content from an unknown country once a week to discover their culture and history. I believe that every country has their own distinctive and unique culture which should be preserved and passed down to their future generations. Therefore, it is also up to us international citizens to learn about other cultures. Some parents may be worried that OTT may contain disturbing and violent content. To prevent this, we can turn on children’s mode and choose the content wisely with parents and guardians.

In conclusion, OTT is a way to bring the story of the world home, like a modern day Silk Road. If we track our time, use it safely and conscientiously, we will not only have fun but also appreciate other cultures. I am sure, OTT can be used to broaden our minds and perspectives to help us connect with friends around the world.

# The Silk Road

*Korean International School, Ngai, Toi Hong – 12*

The Silk Road was an ancient network of trade routes connecting Asia to Europe, its primary time period spanning from the Han Dynasty of ancient China to the Mediterranean, operating from the 2nd century BCE to the 15th century. It was not a single trail but a complex system of land and sea routes that facilitated technology, trade and economic favours for the Eurasian world.

The routes were formally opened around 138 BCE when the Han Emperor sent the envoy Zhang Qian to the west. His missions gathered intelligence and created an extreme demand for Chinese goods, notably silk, in the Western elite classes. This would lead the Han to secure the paths, establishing regular business.

The Silk Road peaked under the Tang Dynasty from the 7th to 9th century, known as the Golden Age. During this period, the exchange would go far beyond luxuries like silk, spices, and porcelain for gold and glass.

Most importantly, the route served as a birthplace for the spread of ideas and religion, Buddhism traveled from India to China, and later, Islamic ideas spread into Central Asia. Notably, paper making and gunpowder began their slow advances to the European world.

A revival occurred in the 13th and 14th centuries under the Mongolian Empire, which secured the trade lanes, allowing travelers like Marco Polo to traverse the routes safely.

The decline of the Silk Road began in the 15th century. It was primarily caused by two factors: the rise of the Ottoman Empire, which restricted access to key sections of the land routes with tariffs, especially after their conquest of Constantinople, a city which held a geographic monopoly over the sea channels and land routes the Silk Road relied on heavily.

Moreover, the development of maritime technology, which made trade via sea cheaper, faster, and safer for bulk transport. This shift enticed European nations to seek and use sea routes to Asia over land travel, leading to the Age of Exploration and the end of the Silk Road's dominance.

# New Tales of China's Silk Road: 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.

# New Tales of China's Silk Road

*St. Margaret's Coeducational English Secondary and Primary School, Choy, Chelsea – 13*

The Silk Road – three words that have been on the tip of our tongues for centuries. Despite being unintentionally created on a journey to find allies in battle, the Silk Road has become an unequivocal symbol of trade and diplomacy over war and conquest.

Why was the ancient Silk Road such a vital piece on the chess board of history?

Firstly, numerous world-changing technologies were disseminated westwards over the Silk Road. Examples include paper, gunpowder, silk making and porcelain making methods. The spread of these technologies resulted in the development of big industries in Europe and the Islamic world and allowed significant historical events to occur. For example, without paper or printing techniques spread to Europe through the Silk Road, there likely wouldn't have been a Renaissance, Reformation nor Enlightenment as publishing and dissemination of information, and therefore printing, was required to express the views and opinions of people during those periods.

Secondly, the spread of western religions changed the culture in the east. From the Han dynasty onwards, China adopted the Central Asian style of Buddhism, which is still a widely practiced religion in the country today. The Mongols helped spread Islam in later days by bringing Muslims to live in their empire through the Silk Road routes.

The Silk Road played a major role in merging the cultures of the different places along it, from production techniques to religion, and was the pinnacle of trade development during ancient times. Likely unbeknownst to the people back then, the Silk Road would pave the way for a greater, more ambitious project that will change the world.

In 2013, China began an attempt to revitalise the Silk Road through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which consists of the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road, encompassing both land and sea. This initiative is a laudable act which intends to boost connectivity of countries through infrastructure projects, stimulate the economic development of all the countries involved and enhance international cooperation.

The “One Belt” stands for the Silk Road Economic Belt initiative, which aims to integrate the economies of China and various countries in Central and Western Asia, the Middle East, and near the Baltic Sea. China is building transportation facilities such as ports and railway facilities in participating countries which make exporting products more economically viable, not only helping the country increase its industrial production and wealth, but also facilitating trade between the countries along the economic belt. The initiative is expected to fare well over the coming years and the countries involved are bound to proliferate as China's economy grows and it seeks to expand the Belt to further regions.

The “One Road” refers to the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road, which stretches to Europe through the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean. Additionally, it stretches to the South Pacific Ocean via the South China Sea. The Road involves countries in Asia, Africa and Europe, highlighting China's eagerness to cooperate with countries all across the globe.

In conclusion, the Silk Road is the quintessential example of how the world could change for the better if global trade and connectivity is established and facilitated. China's Belt and Road Initiative may open a new chapter in the development of the world. Hopefully through the globalisation that this project promises, we will be able to achieve the closest possible thing to world peace.

## New Tales of China's Silk Road

*St. Margaret's Coeducational English Secondary and Primary School, Ho, Yi Ning – 13*

The New Silk Road is a large project that aims to connect many countries through trade and infrastructure. It is inspired by the ancient Silk Road, which were trade routes linking China to Europe thousands of years ago. Today, the New Silk Road is called the Belt and Road Initiative, led by China. Its goals to improve roads, railways, ports, and energy supplies across Asia, Africa and Europe.

As the world changes, the New Silk Road could bring many benefits. First, it can help countries trade more easily. When countries build better roads and ports, goods like clothes or food can be transported faster and more conveniently. This can help countries grow their economies and create more jobs for people. For example, if a country has enough money, they can make some wind mills to make renewable energy sources, and if the wind mills are broken, they need renewable energy technicians to help fix the machine.

Secondly, the New Silk Road can promote better connection between countries. When countries work together on projects like new roads and railways, they can get closer and maybe they can have new friends. This can lead to more peaceful relationships and cooperation on other problems, they can find a better way to solve problems. Try to imagine, if there are some serious problems such as climate change or some pandemics are happening, and the countries are still excluding each other, can the world become a better place to live? Are humans suitable to live here in the future? If countries that work even together often understand each other better, they can create a more and peaceful world.

Third, the New Silk can help some poor countries develop. Many countries in Africa and Asia do not have enough roads or ports. By building better infrastructure, these countries can attract more foreign investment and improve their life quality. For example, better transportation can make it easier for farmers to send crops to markets to earn money. Also, this path can let the students to go to other countries to learn new knowledge.

However, there are also some challenges, some countries are worried about that the project might lead to too much dependence on other countries or cause environmental issues. It is important for the countries to work together fairly and with trust so that they won't make conflicts and to protect the innocent citizens. In conclusion, the New Silk Road has the potential to change and to unite the countries in many positive ways. It can let some poor countries develop or make the cooperate between countries increase. As the world changes, this project could make the world more connected, but it must be done with trust and care. Otherwise, some negative consequences may occur.

# Silk Roads to Highways: The Evolution of Influence and Ambition in China's Belt and Road Initiative

*St. Margaret's Coeducational English Secondary and Primary School, Lam, Huen Yu – 13*

The Silk Road is undoubtedly an indispensable part of Chinese history; carrying goods and ideas between the two great civilizations of Rome and China. Spanning over 6,400 km (4,000 mi) on land, it played a central role in facilitating economic, cultural, political, and religious interactions between the Eastern and Western worlds. However, many believe that the Silk Roads has since lost its prominence and influence in the modern world. While I agree that the significance of the Silk Roads in the world we are currently living in has greatly declined since China's Tang Dynasty, it is irrefutable that the legacy of the Silk Road has made a lasting impact on religion, art and ideas across Eurasia, making it influential in different ways today.

Before we discuss the political impacts of the Silk Roads in today's world, we must understand the difference in the periods. The Ancient Silk Road declined due to 4 main reasons. First, the discovery and development of sea routes by European powers like the Portuguese offered more efficient and cost-effective ways to transport goods than overland caravans. Secondly, political instability deterred trade as the rise of the Ottoman Empire in the 15th century imposed heavy taxes and tolls. Thirdly, the decline of major empires such as the Tang Dynasty in China and the rise of new powers affected trade flow. Lastly, the Silk Road facilitated the spread of the Black Death westward in the 14th century, further disrupting trade and travel.

Prior to the decline of the Silk Road, it experienced a climax in the Tang Dynasty (618–907 CE). This era is often cited as the absolute peak, with the capital Chang'an (Xi'an) becoming a vibrant cosmopolitan hub for merchants, monks and ideas, facilitating Buddhism's spread and Chinese inventions like papermaking moving West. Other times that the Silk Road's prominence reached a crescendo are the 1st–3rd Centuries CE and 500–800 CE. These pinnacles of influence were all due to 3 main reasons: political stability, trade centres along the road, and high demand for goods such as silk in the West.

The Silk Road has significantly influenced China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) uses land-based "Silk Roads" (like high-speed rail, pipelines, economic corridors) to project political influence in the 21st century, aiming to secure resources, expand markets, counter US influence, build economic dependencies, and foster political alignment through infrastructure investment and loan diplomacy, particularly in Central Asia, Europe, and Africa, strengthening China's global power by creating a China-centric trade network.

Economic leverage and debt diplomacy emerge as China offers massive infrastructure loans (rails, ports, energy) to developing nations, creating geo-economic ties and potential dependence, as seen with BRI projects. Additionally, resource and energy security are enhanced as land routes provide diversified access to Central Asian energy resources (oil, gas) and minerals, thereby reducing reliance on sea lanes vulnerable to disruption. The BRI also plays a crucial role in geopolitical competition, serving as a strategic counterweight to Western influence and fostering partnerships with countries seeking alternatives to Western-led development models. Moreover, market expansion is realized through new land corridors, like the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which open new markets for Chinese goods and services, thereby boosting its economic power. Finally, soft power and diplomatic alignment are facilitated through infrastructure projects that promote cultural exchange and foster political goodwill, integrating participating nations into China's sphere of influence.

The BRI initiative creates Economic Corridors, increasing regional connectivity under Chinese vision. The Belt and Road Initiative contains the following six international economic corridors. In addition, new rail lines, such as those connecting China to Europe through Kazakhstan, offer fast trade routes, influencing regional economies and politics. Another example of a mechanism are the energy pipelines from Central Asia secure supplies and strengthen political ties with nations like Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan. Last but not least, multilateral forums like the Forum on China–Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) coordinate BRI projects, enhancing China’s engagement with the Global South.

Despite the BRI bringing ample economic benefits to host countries, it sparks security concerns and debt issues for host nations. Some nations, particularly in Asia, view the BRI as a tool for strategic encirclement or military projection, leading to counter–initiatives like the Quad (Quadrilateral Security Dialogue). “Quad” began when Australia, Japan, India and the United States first came together to provide humanitarian assistance after the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami. After a decade, the four countries have now re–established the Quad in what is considered to be a response to China’s unexpected economic and military assertiveness in the region. The Chinese economy is highly reliant on trade routes that pass through the Indian Ocean, which serves as a vital pathway, particularly for energy supplies, and it is therefore natural for the Chinese government to seek to protect its interests along these sea lines of communication. In my view, the security implications of China’s push into the Indian Ocean are mixed. In peacetime, these efforts will certainly expand Chinese influence in the region, possible through access to port facilities to refuel or resupply naval vessels and in terms of anti–piracy operations and familiarization with other regional militaries. At the same time, however, China’s Indian Ocean presence will likely create as many vulnerabilities as opportunities in terms of protecting trade routes, bases, and ships — particularly in wartime. Some countries also struggle with massive BRI debt, raising concerns about sovereignty and dependency. Furthermore, local resistance may be a challenge that BRI may face due to environmental and social impacts. There are growing questions about the economic viability and the geopolitical intentions behind China’s intentions.

In conclusion, the journey from the ancient Silk Roads to China’s Belt and Road Initiative illustrates a remarkable evolution of influence and ambition. The Silk Road played a pivotal role in shaping economic and cultural exchanges between civilizations, while today’s BRI seeks to create interconnectedness across continents through infrastructure investments and diplomatic relationships. Despite its potential for fostering economic growth and expanding markets, the BRI raises concerns regarding debt dependency, sovereignty, and the geopolitical balance of power. As nations navigate the complexities of this modern initiative, they must weigh the benefits against the risks, ensuring that engagement with China fosters mutual development rather than entrenched dependency. Ultimately, the legacy of the Silk Roads continues to inform China’s global aspirations, while simultaneously prompting critical discussions about the future of international relations and regional stability.

# New Tales of China's Silk Road

*St. Margaret's Coeducational English Secondary and Primary School, Lee, Wing Lam – 14*

The Silk Road, apart from being an artery of commerce, also served as a bridge for cultural interaction. The people who journeyed through this route not only exchanged their goods like silk, spices, and precious materials like gold and silver, but they also exchanged their tales and knowledge. The Chinese, for example, were able to spread their innovations like paper and the compass to the West through the Silk Road, while Western art and religious concepts were introduced to the Chinese. In this manner, the people of different countries were able to understand each other, gaining the ability to speak each other's languages, further increasing friendship and collaboration.

The history of the Silk Road dates back to the 2nd century BC when this trade route was opened by the Han Dynasty. The modern Silk Road does not only boost economic cooperation but also facilitates transnational cultural and educational exchange with China's initiative of the Belt and Road. For instance, Confucius Institutes are established in many countries for promoting the Chinese language and culture, becoming one of the important institutions. Confucius Institutes not only help foreign students learn Chinese but gain deeper understanding of Chinese history, philosophy, and culture through offering language courses, cultural activities, and public lectures. This is a cultural bridge along the modern Silk Road where ideas and perspectives on the same platform are exchanged among students from different countries people

Nowadays, The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is a grand plan proposed by China in 2013, aiming to connect Asia, Europe, and Africa through infrastructure development and economic cooperation. This initiative includes building highways, railways, ports, and other transportation facilities to facilitate trade and enhance connectivity and cooperation among countries. As the BRI progresses, trade relations between China and Southeast Asian countries such as Vietnam, Thailand, and Malaysia have become increasingly close. Through signing trade agreements and promoting investment cooperation, these countries have not only increased bilateral trade volume but also facilitated the flow of goods and cultural exchange. For example, Thailand exports large quantities of agricultural and industrial products to China, while Chinese electronic products and machinery enter these Southeast Asian markets. Such cooperation not only strengthens economic ties but also helps people in both regions gain a deeper understanding of each other.

In conclusion, the Silk Road was more than a historical route because it was also a route through which there was interaction and development culturally and economically that helped to relate to and understand China and other countries. It also helped those from different countries to learn to understand each other and helped to learn from those from different cultures and countries

# New Tales of China's Silk Road

*St. Margaret's Coeducational English Secondary and Primary School, Wong, Wui Ching – 14*

More than twenty-two centuries ago, a brave group of Chinese traders headed to the west. They walked for months under the sun, through deserts and over mountains, carrying bundles of silk. Their goal was simple: to find new customers who might want to buy their beautiful cloth. This difficult journey was a huge success. It grew into the famous Silk Road—a bridge joining Europe to China's Chang'an. For over 1,500 years, this network of routes buzzed with life. It wasn't just silk that travelled. China sent out porcelain and paper, in return, they received grapes, glass, and new ideas about art and religion. The world became more close and a lot more interesting because of the exchanges between.

However, by the 1400s, this great road fell quiet, starting to become a story in history books. But stories can have new chapters. In 2013, the Silk Road was reborn. Today, it is known as the Belt and Road Initiative. It's the largest project of international cooperation in history, with 150 countries taking part. This isn't about camels and dusty trails anymore. It's about high-speed trains, modern ports, satellite networks, and clean energy. It's the old spirit of connection, powered by the 21st century.

So, what do the "new tales" look like? They are written by people just like those ancient traders, but with new tools. Imagine a farmer in Kenya. Before, it took him days to send his fresh flowers to the airport by truck on bumpy roads. Now, thanks to the new railway built through Belt and Road cooperation, his journey is smooth and takes only hours. His flowers reach the world fresher, and his life is better. This is a modern trade story.

Of course, such big project must have faced challenges and questions, just like the old road faced bandits and sandstorms. People rightly ask about the environment, about debt, and about fair benefits. The true success of the new Silk Road depends on how well all countries work together to solve these problems, ensuring that the project brings green and sustainable growth for everyone involved.

The ancient Silk Road shows us that when we are connected, we won't become the same instead we become richer through our differences. The new tales of China's Silk Road are still being written. Their goal is the same as that first trader's—to find different types of people and share opportunities to build a common future. In a world that sometimes feels divided, the reminder of sharing deep interconnection is important as we share our experiences to make us feel linked. The journey that started twenty-two centuries ago continues, promising new stories of cooperation for the next thousand years.

# An Overview of the Development of the Silk Road and its Modern Day Impacts

*St. Paul's Co-educational College, Kaitlyn Audrey, Lee – 14*

## **Historical Background of China's Silk Road**

Over 2100 years ago, China's Silk Road was formally opened, after Zhang Qian's expedition in 138 BC, which set the foundation of the first 'Silk Road'. On Zhang Qian's journey in the Han Dynasty, his biggest aspiration was to demonstrate the possibility for safe travel to the far west. With a huge goal in mind, Zhang Qian successfully facilitated the Silk Road's beginnings facilitated cross-cultural interactions with civilizations across Asia and consequently, the exchange of goods, particularly China's most precious commodity, silk.

Despite the nature of goods that were exchanged, the Silk Road in the early stages, was not luxurious to travel on at all. The Silk Road extended approximately 6,437 kilometers, covering some of the world's most formidable landscapes, including the Gobi Desert and the Pamir Mountains. With no institution to provide upkeep and repairs, the roads were typically unkempt. To protect themselves, traders joined together in caravans with camels or other pack animals, and over time, large inns called "caravanserais" cropped up to house travelling merchants.

## **What was it like to travel along the Silk Road?**

Many stories were swapped in the caravanserais during the long journey, as both folk tales and religious ideas were thought to have been 'traded' along the Silk Road. A common lingua franca – often Turkic – facilitated basic communication between merchants across vast language barriers.

Other facilities along the way included "service stations", where locals made a living from catering to selling travellers' essentials. One "service station" that was exclusive to the Silk Road at that time was the specialist center for china repairs in Tashkent. The center gained popularity as merchants could get their porcelain and ceramics mended if they were broken on their journey.

The journeys were long and arduous, as they involved travelling across treacherous terrains, including high mountains, trekking through deserts, and forging through severe climates. It was truly a miracle that a porcelain dish from China could end up in Italy or France still intact. Trading itself was an art form manifested by certain groups of people known for their skills and excelled as Silk Road traders or specialist transporters, particularly the historic Sogdians in Central Asia.

## **What types of goods travelled along the Silk Road?**

A variety of exclusive goods travelled along the Silk Road. Travelling westward, silk was made into clothes specifically for royalty and wealthy patrons, porcelain carried wealth, while jade, tea, and spices opened pathways for new tastes and technologies to reach as far as Europe. In exchange, horses, glassware, textiles, and other manufactured goods travelled eastward to China from Europe.

Moreover, religions such as Christianity and Buddhism, along with philosophy and scientific knowledge, were spread along the Silk Road just as fluidly as goods. The exchange of information gave rise to new and world-changing technologies and innovations. For instance, the horses introduced to China empowered the Mongol Empire, while gunpowder from China transformed how war was fought in Europe and beyond. Nevertheless, diseases like the Black Death, which devastated Europe in the late 1340s, also travelled along the Silk Road.

### **What does The Silk Road look like now?**

Nowadays, parts of the Silk Road still exist in the form of a paved highway connecting Pakistan and the Uygur Autonomous Region of Xinjiang. The old road has been the impetus behind a United Nations plan for a trans-Asian highway, and a railway counterpart of the road has been proposed by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific.

The Silk Road encompasses anything from railroad lines, bridges, and ports, to pipelines, dams, power plants, and basically categorised under infrastructure. Furthermore, the “Silk Road Economic Belt” runs overland via South, West and Central Asia, while the “Maritime Silk Road” takes the sea route via India and East Africa through the Suez Canal to Europe.

A total of around 100 countries are participating in the New Silk Road, including countries in Asia, Europe and Africa. In the 21st century, the spirit of the Silk Road has been revived through China’s ambitious Belt and Road Initiative launched in 2013. One of the most significant components of this initiative is the China-Europe rail freight connection, which serves as a contemporary Silk Road, linking the two continents with an efficient transport route.

### **The Expansion of the Silk Road and its Future**

China has concentrated its efforts on expanding its civil aviation presence through the Air Silk Road initiative, a strategic component of the broader Belt and Road Initiative. The goal of this campaign is to strengthen trade ties and promote domestically produced aircrafts, particularly C909 and C919 jets, across a network of countries across Central Asia, the Middle East, Africa, and Eastern Europe. By cooperating with over 150 nations, China aims to establish more integrated and international air route networks, and develop express air traffic corridors with key trading partners.

A report issued by the Civil Aviation Administration of China and the National Development and Reform Commission reveals China’s plans to enhance collaboration in aircraft leasing and civil aviation equipment manufacturing. The report highlights the importance of expanding connectivity through new international passenger and cargo routes, as well as increasing flight frequencies. These efforts are critical amid ongoing geopolitical tensions, which have heightened China’s urgency to push for greater self-reliance and influence in global aviation as a whole.

As part of China’s Belt and Road Initiative, Beijing has launched the Digital Silk Road. Announced in 2015 with a loose mandate, the Digital Silk Road has become a significant part of Beijing’s overall Belt and Road Initiative strategy, given which China provides aid, political support, and other forms of assistance to recipient states. The Digital Silk Road also offers support to Chinese exporters, including many well-known Chinese technology companies, like Huawei. The Digital Silk Road improves recipients’ current infrastructure, and promotes Chinese technology globally, such as telecommunication networks, artificial intelligence capabilities, cloud computing, e-commerce and mobile payment systems, which all aim to enhance digital connectivity and China’s influence on the digital world. Together, these initiatives, air or digital, formed a multi-modal network designed to make cross-border trade smoother and reshape global supply chains.

### **The Impact and Significance of the Silk Road**

As China continues to be one of the most important trading partners for many European countries, many European companies undoubtedly benefit economically from a further expansion of the New Silk Road, which offers a plethora of advantages and opportunities for trading partners.

First, transport time is shortened given more diverse trade routes. While maritime transport from China to Europe typically takes 30 to 40 days, rail freight reduces this time to around 12 to 18 days. This large reduction in transit time

is enabled by the new land corridors, along which goods are primarily transported by rail. As a result, businesses can respond more swiftly to market demands and the need for large inventories is reduced.

Besides, goods can be transported more quickly with maximised benefits by freight trains than other means of transportation, which ultimately leads to lower transport costs. Although rail freight is more expensive than sea transport, it is considerably cheaper than air freight. For many businesses, it strikes an ideal balance between cost and speed, providing a middle ground that meets both budgetary and logistical requirements.

Economically, with the expansion of infrastructure, there is bound to be economic development in the countries along the route. It opens up new sales markets for European and Chinese companies and facilitates their future international business.

In addition, rail transport is more environmentally-friendly compared to air and sea transport. Trains emit over 22 times less carbon dioxide than cargo planes, rendering them a much greener alternative. Not only does this help companies to enhance their image and reputations, this has become increasingly important as countries work toward reducing their carbon footprint and align with global sustainability goals.

Lastly, trains run on fixed schedules which make them less susceptible to delays caused by weather conditions, air traffic congestion, or other disruptions common in maritime and air transport. Additionally, railways are less prone to piracy compared to sea routes, increasing the security of transported goods. In other words, the Silk Road provides a much more reliable and secure way of transporting goods.

Thanks to China's Belt and Road Initiative, the Silk Road has certainly morphed and transformed from a simple caravan route into a modern, geopolitically significant network that connects China to the rest of the world. The development of the Silk Road has reaped fruits in an array of aspects and has most definitely surpassed Zhang Qian's expectation of travelling to the West. In fact, not only does the Silk Road serve as China's most important gateway to the West, its significance has expanded to aviation, railway and maritime transport, bringing tremendous benefits to not merely China but also its trade partners along the Silk Road.

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# From Silk Road to Belt and Road Initiative

*St. Stephen's College, Sai Ka Ethan, Lam – 13*

"Class, we're going to learn about the Silk Road today," Mr Li, our General Studies teacher, said.

"That's so exciting! I've always wanted to know more about Silk Road 1.0 and 2.0, the defunct dark web marketplace founded in 2011 to facilitate illegal underground transactions before its eventual closure by law enforcement in late 2014!" I blurted out enthusiastically before I could even raise my hand.

"What?" Mr Li stared at me in disbelief.

That was me in Primary 5...guilty as charged. You have to forgive my innocent, naive ten-year-old self from Gen Alpha – the first generation to grow up entirely in a digital world shaped by technology, smartphones, and artificial intelligence from a very young age. Little did I know at the time that the "real" Silk Road – which had, unfortunately, inspired the name of an infamous online trading platform – actually refers to the famous and vast historical network of trade routes connecting the East and the West dating back twenty-two centuries ago. Not only was the Silk Road instrumental in facilitating the trading of all kinds of goods, but it also resulted in, perhaps unintentionally at first, the exchange of cultural, religious, and even technological elements among peoples of different ethnicities and backgrounds. This could probably be viewed as the "ancient" version of "globalisation" – a concept largely considered an American initiative in the 20th century – but could actually trace its roots back to the Silk Road era. Fast forward to the 21st century, and we see a revival of the old Silk Road in the form of the new Belt and Road Initiative, spearheaded by the Chinese government in 2013 to foster global connectivity through infrastructure as well as economic development and cooperation. There is a lot to learn from the evolution of the Silk Road into the Belt and Road Initiative. There is also much to contemplate about its potential role in shaping the future of human civilisation.

The Silk Road began in 130 BC when the Han dynasty of China opened up trade. At its peak, it stretched about 7,000 kilometres from Chang'an and Xi'an all the way to Athens and Constantinople. Silk Road trade was originally initiated for the Han Emperor to obtain larger horse breeds. Over time, trade grew organically to include silk, jade, precious stones, porcelain, tea, and spices from Asia, alongside glassware, textiles, and other manufactured goods from Europe. The ensuing exchange of information gave rise to new technologies and innovations that would change the world's dynamics. For example, in the legend of the Silk Princess, a Chinese princess who was sent to marry the King of Khotan in modern Xinjiang smuggled silkworm eggs and mulberry seeds in her elaborate headdress to introduce the secret of sericulture to her new kingdom. This led to the development of big industries in silk making in Europe and the Islamic World when the methods became known. This was perhaps an early form of globalisation and technology transfer – cornerstones of international trade today.

While the Silk Road started out as a trade network, it, likely without any deliberate organisation, became a powerful conduit for the spread of arts, culture, religion, philosophies, languages, and scientific knowledge among the people and statehoods along the way, with significant consequences, for better or worse. Religions flowed eastwards, where Buddhism once dominated. The west also introduced wheat and agricultural crops to the east that improved people's diet. Unfortunately, it was also suggested that the bubonic plague spread from Central Asia to Europe and Africa along the Silk Road twice in history, killing millions. Gunpowder from China, too, changed the nature of war in the Western world.

The Silk Road was utilized over a tumultuous period of geopolitical upheavals across the continents, exemplified by historical events such as the haunting Black Death and the violent Mongol conquests. Yet, several factors contributed to the eventual demise of the Silk Road in the 15th century. First, cheaper and faster maritime trade routes resulting from nautical advancements in ships led by the Europeans quickly replaced land routes. Second, the fall of the Mogul Empire weakened the stability and security of the Silk Road for traders. In addition, disruptive trade practices like high taxes imposed by the Ottomans on European merchants made overland trade expensive and difficult. Moreover,

Chinese isolationism in the late Ming Dynasty added to further trade cutoffs. Finally, some routes in Central Asia had succumbed to desertification, making them difficult to traverse. In summary, technology shifts, political instability and empire building, disease and climate change, and a lack of leadership brought an end to the Silk Road after 1,500 years. Incidentally, these are also the same global issues plaguing our world today.

In 2013, the original silk road spirit was revived by the Chinese government when they launched the Belt and Road Initiative (“BRI”), previously called “One Belt, One Road”. Affectionately known as the “New Silk Road”, BRI is much more substantial in scale, goals, and influence. Unlike the Ancient Silk Road, which lacked leadership and was not a centrally planned initiative, BRI is a central component of China’s foreign and economic policy with specific mechanisms for meticulous planning and careful implementation. It has five officially stated goals: 1) policy coordination, 2) facilities connectivity, 3) unimpeded trade and investment, 4) financial integration, and 5) cultural exchange. At a time when we are facing numerous global challenges such as economic recession, unilateralism and protectionism, and regional conflicts, BRI started as a massive infrastructure project of ports, railways, roads, energy pipelines, and even satellite networks to foster and boost global economic growth and reshape the world through shared development and prosperity. As can be seen, the “road” concept of the Silk “Road” was clearly not lost: China designed BRI with the “road” in mind first and foremost, but with advanced technology incorporated into the initiative to increase its speed, scale, reach and impact to usher in the intended goals of cooperation, inclusiveness, innovation, prosperity, and peace.

As of 2023, over 150 countries have joined China's BRI. As the world’s biggest trade nation, China and other BRI nations have tripled their trade to over US\$2 trillion since 2014. According to predictions by the World Bank, by 2030, the BRI will generate US\$1.6 trillion in global revenue each year to account for 1.3% of global GDP. Furthermore, from 2015 to 2030, it is estimated that almost 40 million people will be lifted out of poverty. The Sukkur–Multan section of the Peshawar–Karachi Motorway, a prime project under BRI's China–Pakistan Economic Corridor, is equipped with advanced ITS, including optical cables and monitoring cameras that transmit real–time data to a traffic control centre for safety and management. The Jakarta–Bandung High–Speed Railway in Indonesia, featuring 350km/h trains, is an example of green transport through energy–saving technology, featuring 350 km/h trains. These are just a few examples of BRI’s achievements to date.

To simply call BRI a reboot of Silk Road is certainly an understatement. BRI is a new “invention” inspired by an old concept. It is constantly transforming in response to the ever–changing needs of our world. According to research conducted by Invesco, in recent years, China has introduced modern elements such as Digital Silk Road (“DSR”), Green Silk Road (“GSR”), Health Silk Road (“HSR”), and Polar Silk Road (“PSR”) to the initiative. DSR addresses the vast high–tech evolution and covers its application in digital infrastructure, smart city, and cross–border e–commerce. GSR is a solution to the UN’s sustainable development agenda by reducing coal–related investments and increasing green energy investments. HSR covers broader aspects such as medical innovation, cooperation among healthcare professionals abroad, vaccine diplomacy, and medical facility construction to foster a “community of common health for mankind” with its partnering Belt and Road countries. PSR refers to shortened shipping routes through the Arctic Circle connecting three major economic centres – North America, East Asia, and Western Europe, as well as addressing arctic governance in the development of resource exploration, fishing and other biological resources, tourism, environmental protection and climate change.

Will the Belt and Road Initiative be able to stand the test of time this time? Only time will tell. However, we can be confident that BRI under China’s leadership is, unlike the Silk Road, actively preparing for and responding to the challenges that once led to the decline of the Silk Road from 1453 AD. And to my peers of Gen Alpha: as tempting as it might be for us to think of modern day technology such as artificial intelligence and the virtual world as the only inevitable future of humanity, let's remember that history – the ancient Silk Road – and today’s Belt and Road Initiative are a clear reminder that nature and our real brick and mortar world, shaped by ancestral wisdom, human values, and ethical standards, will remain relevant in defining our future. It's the symbiosis of all these elements, both physical and virtual, augmented by technology, that will continue to advance humanity and make our world a better place.

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# The History Behind the Silk Road

*The Hong Kong International School, Chiu, Alicia – 11*

Imagine yourself joining a caravan on a dusty bustling road; The air is thick with the dust of the Gobi Desert and the chill of the Pamir. It's filled with merchants selling silk and porcelain whilst the air is mingling with the scent of spices.

The silk road didn't have a name back then, many famous traveler's such as Marco Polo or just people who travelled the route during their prime (130 BCE– 1453 CE) never used the term "Silk Road." The name was popularized by Ferdinand von Richthofen, a German geographer and traveler in the year 1877. Richthofen used this name to describe overland trade routes through Gansu and Xinjiang regions of Western China that were for the silk and horse trade during the Han dynasty. Whilst Richthofen is credited with the name's popularization, this name appeared as early as 1838 in the works of German geographer Carl Ritter, who used it to explain the spread of silk production from China to Iran.

This name then gained global popularity in 1938 particularly after Swedish explorer Sven Hedin published a popular book titled *The Silk Road*. Although that's its "official term", many modern historians prefer the plural "Silk routes" as it better reflects that it was a shifting network of complex land and sea pathways not one single road.

China was the primary power behind the Silk Road which officially began in 130 BCE. It served as a starting point for trade routes and the source for the highly valuable silk at the time that also played a role in its name. The Han dynasty's imperial envoy, Zhang Qian, is credited with establishing the route for safe travel through the West with diplomatic explorations and missions throughout 139 BC. Other Chinese Dynasties, notably the Han and Tang dynasty, provided protection from nomadic raiders in the trade route and even managed to expand the Great Wall of China to secure the Hexi corridor, ensuring a safe and steady travel environment for people.

The Silk Road is 6,400 km long trade route connecting China with the Mediterranean. The paths in the Silk Roads started from Ancient China's Capital cities and moved westward splitting the path into two directions north and south to bypass the Taklamakan Desert. The route passes through Xi'an or formerly Chang'an: The official starting point in the east and the capital of China for 13 dynasties. Luoyang: another ancient capital that also served as an eastern starting point during the Han dynasty. Dunhuang: A major oasis city and a Buddhist center, located at the western end of the Hexi corridor, known for its Mogao Caves (A UNESCO World Heritage site containing extensive Buddhist art.) And finally, Kashgar: A crucial intersection city in China's far west (the Xinjiang region), where the Northern and southern routes around the Taklamakan Desert combined into one then continued into Central Asia. From Central Asia, the Silk Road winds into multiple cities of the Western Hemisphere including Istanbul and Dasmascus.

The Silk Road facilitated the exchange of luxury and essential items from across Afro-Eurasia, a supercontinent. Silk was China's main exports was silk, prized by the Romans for its lightweight and versatile nature. Some other Eastern exports included porcelain, tea, jade, paper, gunpowder and a variety of spices such as cinnamon or ginger. The western and central Asia traders sent various breeds of horses, glassware, gold, silver, textiles and exotic fruits such as grapes or walnuts. Aside from physical products these routes were also essential for selling livestock, furs, and sadly slaves too.

The transfer of ideas and religion, rather than the exchange of physical goods, was one of the Silk Roads most lasting impacts. The Silk Road was the primarily vehicle for the spread of Buddhism from India to China and Japan. Making way for eastward expansion of Nestorian Christianity, (where they believe Jesus has 2 distinct natures one fully divine and the other fully human, loosely combined,) and later Islam. These actions eventually reshaped the cultural landscape of Central Asia.

Through these paths, 4 of China's most important inventions re—paper, the compass, gunpowder, and printing — travelled from China to Europe via these routes along the silk road. The Age of Discovery and the European Renaissance were ultimately sparked by these innovations. By acting as intermediaries, Islamic scholars managed to preserve Greek philosophy and advanced mathematics and medicine, which subsequently returned to Europe, pulling the continent out of the Dark Ages.

The Silk Road didn't just disappear. It was slowly choked off by politics, wars and advancing technology. For centuries the Mongol Empire provided relative stability for the Silk Road to grow and thrive. The Mongolian Empire's collapse led to fractured regions, increased conflict and bandits were everywhere, overall making travel

more difficult and riskier. Its collapse transformed originally stable paths into chaotic “no-man’s-land” of regional wars and banditry. This instability was then added to by the rise of the Ottoman Empire, particularly after the capture of Constantinople. The Ottomans imposed excessive taxes and tolls, deterring trade and turning the overland trek into a financial burden. Simultaneously, the Ming Dynasty’s sudden shift to isolationism, closing its borders to foreign influence, accelerated the Silk Road’s decline.

The final blow came straight from the sea. European explorers discovered much faster, cheaper and safer maritime routes compared to the grueling desert. By the mid-15th century these sea routes made the land routes obsolete, putting an end to once historical and bustling trade route.

In conclusion, the Silk Road was a 6,400km network that transformed civilization by exchanging more than just silk. By facilitating the spread of revolutionary inventions and diverse religions, it fueled the renaissance and established a blueprint for global cross-cultural exchange

## Thousand Years of the Silk Road— It Still Shines

*The Hong Kong International School, Wang, Guokuang – 12*

Vaguely a thousand years ago, accompanied by the bells of camels and towering sand dunes are a trade— group that came from the Persian Empire that are quickly traveling. They needed to arrive at the next trade post before nightfall to have enough supplies to last the next day. In the midst of hurrying, a bag of coins was dropped

into the sand, swallowed by sand, forgotten by men. A thousand years later, archeologists were digging around the same area when a metal detector scanned something in the sand. Excited, the team dug the object out and found that it was a bag of coins. Preserved almost perfectly by the layers of sand, this bag of coins that crossed thousands of

years is the embodiment of the exchanging between civilizations, reflecting the purpose and value of the ancient Silk Road.

The ancient Silk Road was first started during the Han Dynasty, with the emperor at that time (Han Wu emperor) funding and sponsoring Zhang Qian's expeditions to the "western world" for military alliances. Ending up with this trading road connecting Eastern and Western civilizations, at first it was simply used to help ancient China find new customers for their overwhelming amount of silk left to rot in the national storage. However, nothing lasts forever. Sadly after a few changing of the dynasties and outbreaks of war, the route began to fade away into history. Although this trade route had been called many names in various countries and languages for a long time, it was not until the famous German geographer Von Richthofen visited China and published the book "China" that it was

named "The Silk Road" in the book. It took root and became widespread throughout all over the world.

Starting from ChangAn or LuoYang, trading alliances will most likely travel through GanSu, XinJiang, to Middle Asia, West Asia and countries that are close to the Mediterranean Sea. With the opening of this trade route, merchant groups from 36 Western countries, Central Asian states, the Persian Empire and even the Roman Empire would travel to China. They would bring their goods to the official trade posts – mostly funded by China – where they could not only browse local products, but also stay at official hotels and arrange feed for their animals. This road that stretches throughout Asia and Europe not only served as a trading route but also became the bridge of civilizations. With the idea of promoting both, countries on the road soon began to develop both culturally and financially.

There are many trade posts like this on the span of the ancient Silk Road within the borders of ancient China. One famous one is the XuanQuan trading post. According to the bamboo slits recording the daily usage of supplies discovered there, archeologists presumed that at that time, XuanQuan trading post was a huge and took in almost 3500 to 5000 people in one day at its prime. Picture this: during a beautiful spring morning, on the Eastern side of the trading post Chinese trading groups are showing beautiful, shining silk and pottery to Western

merchants and preparing to leave. Other Western merchants are setting up stands and shouting out the use of their rare and refreshing spices, while on the Eastern side where the stables are located,

intricately decorated camels and majestic horses with bursting muscles are grazing on fresh grass. On the south side a new group walks in with their belongings... Though this might not be the same case for every trading post, most ones will often be bustling with activity even long after nightfall, dotting the Silk Road with glimmering stars.

However, silk and spices might not be the most important commodity! Some trade groups brought even more precious “treasures” with them into foreign lands: walnuts and pomegranate are planted in the Royal Palaces of ancient China while the process of extracting and producing paper from wood were spread across the Middle Asia countries. Buddhism came to the East and left painstakingly detailed wall painting on the walls of MoGao Caves

while Confucius’s teachings are studied and debated by scholars throughout the Persian Empire. Just like that bag of coin that buried under layers of sand, the Silk Road not only watched the trade of items but also portrayed the in-

depth inheritance of culture, skill and thoughts, allowing these treasures of the mind to traverse with ease throughout the minds of scholars scattered throughout empires.

As time flies by, the Silk Road also got new “upgrades”. On the very same road camels walked, highways are built for cars and high-speed trains. The China Railway Express now carries electronics and car components towards Europe; the containers no longer carry silk and spices but the spirit and idea of “mutual exchanging of

needed goods” still holds. Covering 26 countries, 229 or more cities in Europe, a few million tons of goods for consumers are carried throughout one single year, with 2024 reaching a recording-holding 21000 tons. Digital

versions of the MoGao Caves get shared using the internet, the cultural stories that only gets shared in the cafes of trading posts gets liked and connected by billions of people using shorts. In the farms of Kazakhstan and

neighboring countries, Chinese experts are teaching locals how to plant highly productive wheat. In Chinese supermarkets, honey and nuts nurtured from the Middle East become favorites of shoppers.

Thousands of years later, the Silk Road remains a luminous link between worlds. It weaves through Asia and Europe, bridges past and present, and echoes the timeless verse: “The camel bells still chime along the ancient Silk Road; the horses from far lands still carry the spirit of the Tang and Han dynasties” – a testament to its enduring vitality, boundless goodwill, and unshakable support for civilizations.

# The Silk Road's Legacy

*Wycombe Abbey School, Ho, Justin – 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, Parmar, Kush Jignesh – 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.

## Heavenly Nomads – Astronomy as a part of the Silk Road’s culture

*Po Leung Kuk Choi Kai Yau School, Lan, Leanna – 14*

In the velvet sea of a Silk Road night sky, where caravans once passed beneath an awning of unyielding stars, ancient travelers gazed heavensward not just for guidance, but for glimpses of their fates interwoven in the cosmos.

Chinese Astronomy, one of the world’s oldest traditions, was not just a science but a respected art integral to governance and survival. By the Shang Dynasty (1600–1046 BCE), oracle bones etched with celestial queries tracked harvests and solstices, allowing farmers to align crop yields with astronomical prophecies. The Shang people viewed the movements of stars and planets as omens that could affect the fate of the dynasty. In this worldview, the heavens were not distant nor impersonal; they were an oracle, communicating divine will through eclipses, comets, and planetary alignments inscribed on oracle bones found in Anyang—turtle plastrons and ox scapulae that were heated until they cracked, with the fissures interpreted as responses from deities. Successful harvests were seen as a benediction from the heavens, while failures could be interpreted as divine malediction.

The Han Dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE) transfigured this to an imperial art, with astronomers like Zhang Heng from Eastern Han crafting water-powered armillary spheres that reflected planets and stellar entities. Tools as such ensured that the emperors, proclaimed as “Sons of Heaven” (*tianzi*), maintained the planetary order in relevance to their Mandate of Heaven (*tianming*), where their authority was ameliorated with beliefs in the support of the divine. Zhang Heng’s brilliancy allowed planetary arts to be transcended from a rudimentary divination to a sophisticated state-sponsored discipline. By mastering these instruments, Han rulers could perform rituals, demonstrate their alignment with heavenly will, and issue accurate calendars with a tropical year of 365.2425 days: a number astonishingly close to the modern value.

The silk roads, a network of exchange routes from China through Central Asia to the Mediterranean, remodelled this insular culture to a flourishing convergence of celestial knowledge. Despite the Silk Road’s virtue for being a major material exchange route, a lesser known fact is that it facilitated not only the exchange of goods like silk and spices but also the flow of ideas, culture, and scientific knowledge between East and West. For one, concepts created by Indian mathematicians, such as the number zero, were incorporated into astronomical calculations by scholars, which have further revolutionized the then prodigious systems of astronomy.

In the Tang Dynasty (618–907 CE), horoscopy from Indo-Iranian sources facilitated by intermediaries like the Sogdians introduced nascent concepts such as lunar nodes, integrating new ideas into the foundations of Chinese astronomy. These exchanges recrafted Chinese astronomy’s practical and spiritual layers. Horoscopy, initially a foreign component, gained attention among the Tang superiors, who began utilising star-based horoscopes for marriages and military campaigns despite resistance from Confucian scholars, who feared ‘unnatural’ foreign practices that diluted the purity of China’s cosmic order. To the Silk Roads’ celestial legacy, it is corroboration that cross-country innovation came at costs of cultural homogenisation.

The Yuan Dynasty (1271–1368 CE), under Mongol rule, presented the pinnacle of Sino–Islamic work. Kublai Khan’s Bureau of Islamic Astronomy in Beijing, being staffed by Persian experts and astronomers, worked with Chinese astronomers to consummate calendars and predictions. In turn, Chinese delegations visited Iran’s Maragheh Observatory, taking inspiration from mathematical models to refine their armillary spheres. The Silk Road’s era of cosmopolitan ideals made the capital a celestial metropolis, where knowledge transcended bordering divides.

To the west, the Islamic Golden Age (8th–13th centuries) saw Persian observatories amalgamate Greek, Indian, and Babylonian astronomy. Greek and Indian astronomical predictions were then translated into Pahlavi, and later into Arabic, establishing new divination theories and practices. The astralobe, a device for measuring star altitudes, reached China through Arab merchants, assisting caravans across deserts such as the Taklamakan and other winding routes of the Silk Road.

Not only were planetary ideals integrated into Chinese astronomy, but China’s influence radiated outward as well. In Central Asia, Sogdian traders and Uyghur nomads consolidated China’s 12–animal zodiac, mixing it with Persian astrology to create the modern birth–year divinations. Turtle–based divination scrolls, used to locate goods or ensure safe caravan journeys had merchants timing departures to avoid monsoons, using star positions confirmed by Chinese and Indian almanacs, while nomads aligned migrations with solstices.

Astronomy’s efficacy extended to medicine and the corporeal spirit, permeating lives in ways that highlighted the interconnectedness of heaven and Earth as the Chinese thought. In China, physicians timed treatments to lunar phases, believing celestial cycles influenced the flow of *qi* (bodily energy). This stemmed from the foundational traditional Chinese medicinal principle of ‘correspondence between heaven and man’ (*tian ren he yi*), where the human body was viewed as a microcosm of the universe, with lunar waxing and waning mirroring the ebb and flow of yin and yang energies. For instance, during the full moon (associated with peak yang energy), treatments like acupuncture or herbal prescriptions were deemed more potent for invigorating conditions, while the new moon, (embodying yin dominance), favored restorative therapies for rest. This intricate back and forth of healing is rooted in China’s view of the body as a cosmic power, carrying Chinese medico–astronomical practices westward.

Yet, this exchange bore a cost. Knowledge, more often than not, arrived amidst conquests or cultural upheavals. Mongol invasions in the 13th century, while enabling exchange, came with the brutal subjugation of local traditions. Centers like Nalanda and Vikramashila were sacked, their libraries burned, and monks scattered or killed, leading to the loss of Sanskrit texts on astronomy. Ironically, many surviving Indian astronomical works were revived only through Chinese translations preserved in monasteries like those in Dunhuang.

In China itself, foreign astrologers faced suspicion from Confucian elites, who saw Indian horoscopy as a threat to traditional cosmology and moral order. Confucianism, an ideology placing emphasis on an ethical governance in comparison to mystical divination, branded Indian horoscopy or Persian astrology as superstitious and erroneous, with the potential to undermine the emperor’s Mandate of Heaven by introducing unpredictable celestial interpretations. During the Tang and Song dynasties, such resistance manifested in court

debates and purges, where foreign astrologers, despite their expertise, faced expulsion, accused of corrupting the pure, observation-based Chinese astronomy rooted in circumpolar stars and equatorial measurements.

The reciprocity of the Silk Road's astronomical culture inadvertently shaped a narrative that would evolve over centuries. Yet, the stars above remain steadfast, witnessing both the conflicts and collaborations that defined humanity's relationship with the heavens. In the velvet sea of the modern night sky, those unyielding stars still shimmer, whispering not just of trade but of China's timeless odyssey to weave its fate with the cosmos—an empyrean dance that endures, fragile yet unbroken, across the ages.

# Embody Silk Road Values: Helping Madagascar Grow Stronger

*Pui Ching Middle School (Macau), Lin, Sin Wai Tiffany – 12*

Around two thousand years ago, the historic China's Silk Road played an important role in linking Asia, Africa, and Europe's trade and friendship. Today, China carries the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) projects to continue the historic Silk Road's spirit. One of the brightest examples is Madagascar, which is one of the poorest countries in the world. In 2023, Madagascar celebrated 50 years of friendship with China by making three important events – the Egg Road, hybrid rice technology, and Chinese medical aid.

In the past, Madagascar's people live in poor environment, but with China's wonderful help, it turns Madagascar into an innovative place, and improved their economy. These events show the importance of the Silk Road, like helping each other, sharing benefits, and making progress together.

When I read about projects like these, I feel really warm because they help make the world a nicer place. They encourage people from different countries to trust and understand each other and also offer help when some of them need the assistance. If more countries could work together, like Silk Road, I really think our world would be fairer and friendlier.

I believe the Silk Road helps people connect and share what they have. For example, Mahazaza Town, it is known as Madagascar's "Egg Village", faced many serious problems before. This town produced more than 40% of the country's eggs, but when drivers drive them on the road to the capital, Antananarivo, around 10% to 20% of the eggs break along the way because the road was in an absolutely terrible condition, and trucks would take about 3 to 4 hours to make the journey. As a result, many farmers were losing money and hope.

Everything began to change in 2018. Madagascar's president talked to Chinese officials about the problem, and kindly requested China to help and solve the issue quickly. So, Chinese engineers built a 19-kilometer asphalt road for free and completed it in 2022. Now, it takes only 20 minutes to travel, and almost all the eggs arrive without breaking! The town's income from eggs went up from 19 million to 30 million Malagasy Ariary each year.

When countries help each other build roads, they don't just create an amazing future; they also strengthen their friendships. I hope in the future, more "Egg Roads" can appear in other countries that need them.

When people have enough food on the dining table, they feel safe and happy. Previously, the local rice types only gave 1 to 2 tons per hectare in Madagascar. That was not enough, and many families went hungry. In 2007, Chinese agronomist Hu Yuefang, a student of the "Father of Hybrid Rice" Yuan Longping, came to Madagascar to help change that. After over 18 years of hard work, Hu and his team overcame various problems and eventually developed five hybrid rice strains adaptable to Madagascar's dry and rocky conditions. Currently, the local rice reaches about 7.5 tons per hectare, and up to 8.6 tons in good years. By 2025, hybrid rice already covered 90,000 hectares, turning Madagascar into Africa's largest hybrid rice grower. Farmers who once struggled to feed their families can now sell extra rice and earn money. Hu and his team also taught many local farmers modern farming skills. He said a thoughtful sentence, "We don't just give fish; we teach to fish." I totally agree with that. Teaching others how to succeed is better than only helping once.

Health is one of the most important things to a person. It's something that money can't buy. Since the 1970s, Chinese medical teams helped thousands of people in Madagascar improve their health conditions. One example is Doctor Li Yongsheng, who stayed there for over twenty years. He used acupuncture to help patients who were in need. There was even a nurse who continued to help and work in Madagascar. However, after she heard that her father had passed away in China, she stopped her work and went back to China. The local people felt very upset.

For Madagascar, these projects are not just about constructing new buildings or getting more money. They give people confidence, resources, and independence. For China, this support is a sign of real friendship. They support others without wanting any money or resources back, which help build a friendly and colorful future in the world.

The world has entered an uncertain period. There are still several western countries that hope to adopt hegemonism, seize the world's resources, and thus challenge the wars and disputes between countries. In my opinion, hegemonism is out of date. The connections and interdependence between countries are becoming increasingly close. Major and advanced countries should have a sense of responsibility and engage in altruistic behavior instead of forcibly seizing resources from other countries.

Personally, I think the story of Madagascar and China cooperation shows us what the world should be like – countries helping each other, sharing what they can, and living in peace. If all countries could be kinder to each

other like this, the world would not only be fruitful but is also full of understanding and happiness. Just like the ancient Silk Road brought people together a long time ago, today's Silk Road connects our hearts, freedom and goals. When we walk this road together step by step, we can create a peaceful and wonderful world for everyone.

# The Rich History of China's Silk Road Through Two Tales

*Shanghai American School, Lu, Xinyi Isabella – 14*

The story of the Silk Road is told twice. Throughout human history, this concept had such a profound impact on civilization at the eastern border of Asia that it completely changed the global map. This ancient network initially emerged as the Silk Road, an enormous, natural, whispering network of routes and lost cultures. The second time, it presented us with the worldwide project known as the Belt and Road Initiative, which involves bricks and government debt. We refer to them as "old" and "new," but doing so ignores the deep, fundamental difference between them.

The Old Silk Road:

The original Silk Road was never a single path, nor was silk in its primary focus; it was a vast web of little bonds. This was a remarkable exchange. Communication and warfare transformed when paper and gunpowder made their way from China to the west; while science and mobility were transformed by the introduction of mathematics, astronomy, and technology from the East. The western voyages of Zhang Qian, a representative of the Han Dynasty in the second century BCE are often quoted as its roots. His trip proved to be a global success and soon grew into a two-way trade channel that linked Europe with Chang'an, the largest city in China. But rather than being a direct link, this "joining" was a risky game.

Its power came from its structure. A Sogdian trader might only have to go from Samarkand to Dunhuang before his goods would be sold to a trader in Xinjiang and then to a Chinese vendor. This local knowledge was the key to the Silk Road's prosperity. It was centered on cultural exploration, exchange, and survival rather than an agreement. There were many light, priceless, and precious commodities transported such as silk, spices, jade, and glassware. The Indian Ocean's rainy season winds and the march of camels across the desert drove this huge business.

Beyond mere commerce, the network's true impact lays in the unplanned fluid movement of biology and culture. Silk Road became one of the most pivotal passages in history because it was more than just an exchange of goods. Indian and Chinese Buddhism as well as Islam in Central Asia all incorporated elements of Greek and Roman art. Along these routes traveled incredible inventions (such as paper, gunpowder, and the compass), delicious foods (particularly grains, meat, and an abundance of vegetables), stunning paintings, and unique philosophies. Crucially, it also traded invisible products, such as diseases like the bubonic plague that affected farming and communities across continents, along with international agricultural cargo like cotton and citrus fruit. Its historical legacy is referred to by languages, religions, and DNA.

For nearly 1,500 years, this network thrived because it addressed the needs of different communities rather than maintaining an empire policy. Eventually, it disappeared in the mid-1400s due to the political collapse of the Mongol Empire, the downward turn of the Ming Dynasty, and the increasing shipping power of European navies. Its paths returned to peace, but it was not destroyed—instead, simply left alone.

The New Silk Roads:

In contrast, the Chinese government launched the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) as a strategic plan when it announced its return in 2013. As an opportunity for global connectivity, the BRI makes use of infrastructure and commercial services mainly supported by government debt. Because China provides loans to partner countries for the building process of infrastructure, this sets BRI apart from previous trade models.

The old roads were a system of paths, while the new roads are sections of framework. The "Belt" refers to transcontinental networks of high-speed railways, highways, and pipelines, while the "Road" refers to several controlled seaports from Sri Lanka to Greece. In addition to luxury goods, the cargo now contains significant amounts of electronics, machine equipment, and oil. Container ships and fast trains now set the pace, moving items in less than two weeks from Chongqing to Duisburg, Germany.

The main driving forces are state capital and a plan for the future. Apart from trade, the goal is to incorporate international supply chains, control energy flows, and raise Chinese standards in everything from

telecommunications (5G) to currency (the digital yuan). Due to the possibility for further growth, it quickly grew to become the biggest international trade program in history, with participation from over 150 nations.

The Old Silk Road serves as a reminder that once a connection is established, it takes on its own identity and can have unexpected effects that go beyond the economy; while the New Silk Roads serve as an example of how the internet is a powerful tool for state power and globalization in the modern world. One is based on a clear plan, while the other is the result of many individual journeys. When they are examined together, it becomes clear that one of the world's ongoing tales is the desire to bring everyone together, even in the digital age.

Looking back at this enormous masterpiece full of wonder as a Hong Kong Young Writer of 2026, I see a story that is still being written. Silk Road teaches us that relationships are influential and necessary. It reminds us that thoughts, creativity, and identity are translated rather than simply shared when civilizations come together. The current version encourages us to think about whether in our quest of connection, we foster the same spirit of shared progress.

Our desire for a better life is eventually what drives the Silk Road. Even as new plans and products emerge to replace earlier ideas, the primary journey continues. It is the continuous flow of merchandise, the interaction and mixture of perspectives, and the tireless effort to promote interactions between cultures. This is how the complex world we live in has always been woven, thread by thread. The Road never disappeared, rather it simply changed, waiting for each new generation to respond to the same continuing call—to go beyond the limits with its own set of resources.

# The New Silk Road

*Shatin Tsung Tsin Secondary School, Fung, Hiu Yin – 13*

I travelled to Xinjiang last summer. As I stared at the highway sprawling across the desert—I thought of the silk Road that once wound through this same land. Back then, it was camels instead of cars, that carried dreams across dunes; merchants walked for months to trade Silk for spices, while now, a highway connects Kashgar to Urumqi in a single day. But I realised that the heartbeat of the road has never changed. Even in ancient times, these routes were more than trade paths: caravanserais buzzed with multilingual chatter, where a merchant might barter Persian carpets for Chinese tea, and a Buddhist monk shared scrolls with a Nestorian priest. Nights brought storytelling around campfires, blending myths from Rome, Persia, and China into sharing tales.

The Silk Road got its name because after Zhang Qian and Ban Chao opened up the Western Regions, Chinese products were transported to western countries via a trade route connecting Eurasia. Among these products, silk was the most widely traded and sought after by various countries.

The Silk Road started in Chang'an, crosses the Hexi Corridor, and then splits into the "Southern Route" and the "Northern Route". Passing through various countries in the Western Regions and then crossing the Pamir Plateau, the route continues westward, reaching places like Dayuan, the Yuezhi, and even Daqin.

The Silk Road greatly promoted economic and cultural exchanges between China and the West and had far-reaching influence. Well-drilling, iron-casting techniques, and silk were introduced to the West via the Silk Road, helping to improve the living standards of local people. Among these, silk was a particularly popular Chinese specialty in the West and a very important commodity in China's foreign trade. In return, camels, Akhal-Teke horses, grapes, as well as music and dance from the Western Regions, were brought to China, enriching both material and spiritual lives of the Chinese people. Moreover, Buddhism spread eastward from India, and many countries in the Western Regions adopted it. With frequent exchanges between China and foreign countries, Buddhism was introduced to China via the Silk Road during the Han Dynasty. After Emperor Huan of Han, more and more monks from the Western Regions came to China, which led to the widespread dissemination of Buddhism.

The Silk Road remained influential for more than one and a half thousand years but eventually declined due to political instability and the rise of maritime trade. However, it was revived in 2013.

The new Silk Road—known as the Belt and Road initiative (BRI), or the "One Belt One Road" in China—is a global infrastructure and economic development strategy launched by the government of the People's Republic of China in 2013. "The Belt and Road" is the abbreviation of "the Silk Road Economic Belt" and "the 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road". The BRI is central to Chinese foreign policy, promoting trade connectivity and China's leadership role in global affairs. "One belt" refers to the Silk Road Economic Belt, and "One Road" refers to the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road collectively known as the Belt and Road Initiative. Unlike the ancient Silk Road's informal networks, the BRI is a deliberate strategy to link Asia, Europe, Africa, and beyond through ports, railways, pipelines, and digital corridors.

The Silk Road's legacy as a catalyst for cross-civilisation exchange did not fade with its medieval decline—it laid the groundwork for a new era of global connectivity, embodied today by the Belt and Road Initiative. To understand this evolution, we must first deepen our appreciation for the Silk Road's multifaceted influence beyond trade: It was a "highway of ideas" that redefined how societies interacted. For instance, the spread of Buddhism via the Silk Road was not merely a religious transfer; it reshaped art, architecture, and philosophy across Asia. Buddhist monasteries along the route became hubs of learning, where monks translated scriptures into local languages and blended Indian artistic styles with Central Asian and Chinese traditions. Similarly, technological exchanges were transformative: paper making, invented in Han China, travelled along Silk Road routes, revolutionising record-keeping and education in the Islamic world and later Europe. Crops and silk reshaped agricultural economies, while musical instruments enriched Chinese culture expression. These exchanges were not one-sided: they created a shared Eurasian heritage that persists in food, language, and customs today.

Yet the BRI is more than an infrastructure project; it mirrors the Silk Road's emphasis on people-to-people ties. Today, BRI-funded culture centres, student exchange programs, and tourism initiatives rekindle the cross-cultural curiosity of the ancient route. In Xi'an, museums now host joint exhibitions with Central Asian nations, while young entrepreneurs in Uzbekistan sell traditional textiles to Chinese consumers via BRI-supported e-commerce platforms. These interactions echo the Silk Road's medieval markets, where merchants bartered goods and stories alike.

Critics argue that the BRI carries geopolitical and economic risks, such as debt burdens for participating nations, but its alignment with the Silk Road's core ethos—mutual exchange—remains clear. Just as the ancient Silk Road turned isolated communities into interconnected civilisations, the BRI seeks to bridge gaps between developed and developing economies, using infrastructure as a foundation for shared growth. For instance, in Kenya, the Mombasa-Nairobi Standard Gauge Railway has cut travel time between the two cities from 12 hours to four, boosting trade and creating 30,000 local jobs—echoing how the ancient Silk Road lifted the prosperity of oasis towns like Samarkand.

In the end, the Silk Road and BRI are two chapters of the same story: humanity's drive to connect. The ancient route used camels and caravans; the modern initiative uses train and fibre optics. But both are rooted in the belief that when societies trade goods, ideas, and cultures, they grow stronger together. As we look to the future, the BRI's success will depend on honouring the Silk Road's most enduring lesson: Connectivity is not just about moving things—it's about moving people closer.

# New Tales of China's Silk Road

*Shatin Tsung Tsin Secondary School, Kwok, Tsz Ching – 13*

China's Silk Road had disappeared in the mid-1400s but a new Silk Road was advocated in 2013. What can it do and how can it change and affect the world? Before talking about the new Silk Road, let's converse about the old one.

Back in the Han Dynasty, Emperor Wu of Han was planning to attack Xiongnu since the Han Dynasty grew more powerful. Zhang Qian was dispatched to the Dayuezhi to instigate an alliance between the Western Regions states and the Han Dynasty. He visited many other countries in the Western states. During the journey, Chinese civilization was transmitted to the Western states, for instance, well-drilling and iron-casting techniques and the popular Chinese specialty, silk. They helped improve the living standards of the people in Western states. Some Western products and culture were also introduced to China, to illustrate, camels, grapes, music, dance and even Buddhism. The journey greatly promoted the economic and cultural exchanges between China and Western states.

The new Silk Road is called The Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st-century Maritime Silk Road. The states that joined the project are China, Central, North and West Asia, Indian Ocean coast, the Mediterranean Sea, South America, Africa, and the Atlantic region. Some of the places are the same as where Zhang Qian had travelled to.

Similar to the old Silk Road, the new Silk Road can promote the economic and cultural exchanges between different countries. Most of them are developing countries. China has advanced skills, such as high-speed conventional trains and building reservoirs. These technologies can greatly help other developing countries. Those countries can have more ameliorate and secured technologies by paying China money. This action can promote China's economy. Both sides can have benefits.

Moreover, transportation nowadays is more convenient compared to the Han Dynasty, people can travel to different countries with less time. Governments or schools can set up more exchange groups to the countries that joined the new Silk Road project. Students can learn about each other's culture, for example some traditional dances or instruments, meet new friends and broaden their horizons. Furthermore, scientists or other kinds of professionals can exchange their research or ideas. Some developing countries' education standards can also be improved.

In conclusion, the new Silk Road provides a great opportunity for countries to build up amicable relations, exchange their technologies and improve developing countries' educational standards and transportation systems.

# New Tales of China's Silk Road

*Shatin Tsung Tsin Secondary School, Mak, Tsz Yu Aimee – 13*

China's Silk Road, a bridge that connects both ancient wisdom and modern innovations, in which is still lasting until today. It connects distant lands into close neighbors as they continue to strengthen their bond with each other, helping and providing support to one another as they walk towards the bright future ahead.

Looking back into the past histories of the China Silk Road, it all started when the first people who used the silk road, Zhang Qian, whose missions and intentions to the Western regions, opened up the foundation for the Silk Road as an official trade barrier. During those times, Chinese people used the silk road to trade materials and supplies with the countries from the Western areas. They brought back resources from the West and experiences upon returning back to China. This greatly broadened their horizons as they approached many different cultures and knowledge which are different from theirs.

While the Silk Road provides opportunities to connect with the world, it's also a corridor for cultural exchanges as people also learned different cultures around the world through the Silk Road. For example, they may take inspiration from the celebrations and festivals from the West. It is also common in the past for them to take inspiration from the politics arrangement from the West and try to promote new political changes to their own country, in which it may help to enhance its economic state by encouraging people to work by establishing a new politic rule inspired by the Western countries. Trading in different countries allows them to meet different people which comes from different places, in which, their language is different from them. This allows them to have opportunities to learn languages from different places so that the salesman and merchants can have a better ability to communicate with the others while trading and making business deals. This results to enhance the connection and interactions between the East and the West. These meaningful exchanges are not just about respecting each other and displaying different cultures, but also about fostering the understanding and bonding in relationships between different nations.

Nowadays, with the emerging rise of technology growth and the inventions of Artificial Intelligence and robots, these bring us to a different era apart from the ancient times. These are the forces behind the New Silk Road's transformation, which is known as the Digital Silk Road nowadays. With the help of modern technology, this can help to ensure to safety and efficiency of goods transportation during trading and business deals. Still, the elements and values between the nations remained as the relationships between the regions only got stronger, discussing global problems together during global conferences as the leaders all sat together representing their own country, but also helping each other, seeking solutions, exploring more and growing stronger together, providing a better life for the citizens and themselves. The Silk Road has changed from before as the world keeps improving and changing every day.

Of course, at the same time, the New Silk Road also faced various difficulties and challenges. For example, the cultural differences and different opinions may hinder cooperation. But if we are all willing to work together, we will always overcome the challenges and find a solution. Through these moments of communication and mutual assistance, it can strengthen the bonding, trust and friendships between different nations. Performing the spirits from the ancient Silk Road which symbolizes about peace and cooperation which is still operating and in use until now. Many things may change throughout the time as we keep improving and renovating, but the only thing that will stay is the bonding and relationships between humans.

Up until now, the China Silk Road which is the bridge connecting the past and the future, has contributed a lot as it created a barrier for us to interact with the West since the ancient times. It plays a crucial role as it opened the path for communication through different regions and interactions with the West. Even though we come from different places and have different backgrounds, we, humans, are a community together, learning from each other and respecting each other's cultures. We are all a part of the root of a big tree, supporting and helping each other through hard times. These beautiful moments in human nature perfectly reflects the symbol of hope, as we face challenges together. People from different countries connected by the Silk Road, working hand in hand to build a better community as well as a better future.

# New Tales of China's Silk Road

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Long ago, China was linked to many distant lands through a well-known network of trade routes called the Silk Road. These routes carried valuable goods like spices, treasures, and ideas between East and West. The ancient Silk Road was more than a trade route; it was a bridge between cultures, people, and stories. Today, China is creating new tales of the Silk Road through a project called the Belt and Road Initiative. This modern Silk Road brings countries together again, but in new and exciting ways.

The original Silk Road began over two thousand years ago during the Han Dynasty in China. Many people from faraway lands wanted Chinese silk because it was rare and beautiful. Traders traveled thousands of miles through deserts and mountains, facing dangers to bring silk to Europe and the Middle East. But the Silk Road was not just about silk. It also served as a pathway for merchants, travelers, and explorers to exchange pottery, tea, art, scientific ideas, and religions like Buddhism.

The ancient Silk Road helped people learn about other cultures. It allowed people to taste new foods, wear new clothes, and hear new stories. This enriched countries with knowledge and culture. However, the journey was also difficult. Harsh weather like sandstorms and freezing temperatures made travel dangerous. Despite these challenges, the spirit of adventure and hope pushed traders forward.

Today, China has revived this idea significantly through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). This modern version is not just one road; it is a vast network of railways, highways, and pipelines that connect Asia, Europe, and beyond. The goal is to make travel faster and easier while strengthening friendships between countries.

Unlike the ancient Silk Road, which focused largely on trading goods, the Belt and Road is about sharing development and cooperation. Countries involved in the project work together on many things, such as improving infrastructure, boosting economies, and promoting cultural exchanges. This makes the world a more connected place. For example, new railways built under the Belt and Road link China to Europe, allowing goods to be transported in less time than by sea. Ports like Gwadar in Pakistan are becoming important hubs that help trade flow more smoothly. This kind of cooperation can bring economic benefits to countries by creating jobs and improving transportation.

New tales from the Silk Road include stories of people whose lives have changed through the projects. For instance, in Pakistan, many individuals have found new jobs building roads and railways. Farmers can sell their products to distant markets, which helps increase their income. Chinese engineers and workers who go abroad also share their skills and culture with local communities.

Another inspiring story is about students studying abroad in Belt and Road countries. They learn ideas, languages, and make friends from all over the world. This helps young people understand each other better and creates a generation that values international friendship.

In Central Asia, the new rail links have made it easier for small businesses to thrive. They can now sell crafts, textiles, and food products to buyers in faraway countries. Artists and musicians also collaborate across borders, mixing styles and creating new forms of art inspired by the Silk Road's history.

At the same time, new characters bring fresh energy to the Silk Road story. For example, Amir from Uzbekistan is a young entrepreneur who uses new railway connections to export his handmade carpets to Europe. Before the Belt and Road, Amir's business was small and local. Now, thanks to faster trade routes, he sends his carpets to shops thousands of miles away. Amir shares stories about how ancient traders once crossed the same lands where his carpets now travel, making him proud to continue this tradition.

In Kenya, another young person named Amina dreams of improving her community's access to clean water. She joined a regional program funded by the Belt and Road Initiative that focuses on building water systems. Amina is studying engineering and hopes to design better pumps that help farmers and families. Her work connects distant continents, reflecting how the Silk Road links people with resources and knowledge. Meanwhile, in Italy, Lucia is a music student fascinated by the Silk Road's cultural history. She participates in an international arts festival supported by Belt and Road countries. Lucia learns traditional Chinese instruments and blends them with

Italian folk music to create new sounds. For her, the Silk Road is about creativity and stories across borders, not just goods and money.

However, this large project faces challenges. Some people worry about environmental impacts from building roads and railways. Others are concerned about ensuring that all countries benefit, not just the strongest ones. It is important for everyone involved in the Belt and Road to work together openly and fairly. To create new tales of success, countries must also respect each other's cultures and traditions. Cooperation means listening, sharing, and solving problems together. This is what made the Silk Road great and is still key to the new Silk Road's future.

As an eighth-grade student, I believe the Silk Road teaches us valuable lessons. It shows the power of connection and how people from very different places can work together for a better future. The Silk Road is about more than trade; it is about friendship, culture, and learning.

In today's world, where we face many challenges—from climate change to political conflicts—the ideas behind the Silk Road can inspire us to build bridges instead of walls. The new Silk Road reminds us that cooperation and understanding are essential for peace and progress.

Imagine a story of a young girl named Mei who lives in a small village in western China. Thanks to the new Silk Road projects, Mei's village now has a school and faster internet. Mei dreams of becoming a scientist. She uses online classes to learn about robotics from teachers in other countries.

One day, Mei joins a virtual meeting with students from Pakistan, Kenya, Italy, and Uzbekistan, all connected by the Belt and Road. They share their inventions aimed at solving environmental problems. Mei's team creates a small solar water pump that helps farmers grow crops. Through the new Silk Road, Mei's dreams and ideas spread far, making the world a better place.

Then there is Tariq, a young engineer from Pakistan working on expanding the Gwadar port. He feels proud that his work improves trade and brings jobs to his hometown. Tariq tells his children stories of the Silk Road, ensuring they know how the past and present are linked.

The Silk Road, both ancient and new, symbolizes connection and sharing. It shows how we can come together to exchange not only goods but also ideas, culture, and friendship. The new tales of China's Silk Road are full of hope and possibilities for many countries working together.

As students, we can learn from the Silk Road's history and its future vision. We should remember to be curious, open-minded, and respectful of other cultures. Like Mei, Amir, Amina, Lucia, and Tariq, we all have a chance to be part of new stories that bring the world closer.

The journey continues, and with it, the new tales of China's Silk Road inspire us to dream big, work together, and create a brighter future for everyone.

# 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 1<sup>st</sup> 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 14<sup>th</sup> 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 5<sup>th</sup> 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 12<sup>th</sup> 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.

# The Silk Road— The Road That Brought Us All Together

*The King's School Qianhai Shenzhen, Bala, Arya – 11*

## Introduction

The Silk Road began in north-central China in Chang'an (modern day Xi'an). The streets were filled with merchants, city dwellers, and farmers from the surrounding countryside. Everyone was trying to make a good sale or a good purchase. Some people drove carts pulled by camels or donkeys. Others arrive on foot.

There were rows and rows of booths proudly displaying every kind of item imaginable. Fabric, jewellery, leather goods, and carpets were laid out for inspection. In one row, meat vendors sold sheep, goats, pigs, chickens, and ducks. Down another row, neatly stacked piles of melon, grapes, and figs are for sale. An inviting smell comes from a booth filled with sacks of colourful spices—black pepper, yellow sesame seeds, orange saffron, red curry powder, and many more.

Also bottles of herbal medicine lined all the shelves of a stall next to some chairs where customers are getting their hair cut or their teeth pulled out. Everywhere salespeople call out to passers-by. Friends greeted each other, traders haggled nose to nose, and children raced up and down the alleys in between.

## People of the Silk Road

Over thousands of years, the Silk Road touched many different land and cultures. But it probably had the greatest effect on people of Central Asia. Without the Silk Road, this hard-to-reach region might have had very few visitors from the outside world. But because there were fortunes to be made by carrying goods through Central Asia, visitors did come through—lots of them; and not just traders!

The Silk Road brought adventures, missionaries, and invading armies. Some passed through; many stayed and became part of the community or created new ones. Central Asia cities grew rich catering to Silk Road travellers. Local crafts makers added their products to the goods traded from East and West. As a result, Central Asia built connection with Greece, Rome, the Middle East, Persia, India, China, and beyond.

Family loyalty is an important trait. So is loyalty to their clan or tribe. Central Asian people have great respect for aksakals or “white beards,” the senior members of their clan. And they honour and preserve their history and culture through storytelling.

## The History Of the Silk Road

The history of the Silk Road is the story of mighty emperors and brave adventurers. But it's also the tale of merchants setting out to make their fortune, and missionaries bringing their faith to new lands. All played a role in shaping the history of the silk road region.

## Travel And Trade Before the Silk Road

People began using parts of the Silk Road as far back as 5,000 years ago. At first, some neighbouring trade routes connected with the silk road and then the traders began to exchange goods with traders from other routes. This ceased long delivery chains that passed goods back and forth over much greater distances that most merchants were willing to travel. Some earthly routes that became part of the Silk Road such as:

## The Jade Road

China began importing jade from central Asia around 5000BCE. Jade is a hard, shiny stone, found in pale green, cream, brown, and other colours. It was used for carvings. The most desirable jade came from the Rikers running into the city of Khotan.

### **Alexander The Great Brings Greek Culture to Central Asia**

The first major step opening the Silk Road between the East and the West happened in 330 BCE. This was when Alexander the Great, leaders of the Greek empire, conquered Persia. Alexander and his troops took control of the Persian Road and pushed into Central Asia and India. This brought a long-lasting Greek influence to the region.

Alexander married a princess named Roxane. She was the daughter of the chief of Bactria in Afghanistan. After making Bactria its eastern capital, Alexander built 30 new cities throughout Central Asia. The cities were filled with Greek temples and art. By the time Alexander died in 323 BCE, he had sparked a new Central Asia culture combining Greek, Persian, and Indian styles.

### **East Meets West**

The next big step in opening up the Silk Road between East and West happened around 200 years after Alexander the Great. It took place in China.

In 138 BCE, the Chinese Emperor Wudi of the Han Dynasty sent a diplomat named Zhang Qian West to make an alliance with the people of Central Asia. China needed help fighting the nomads of the Eurasian steppe. But the nomads captured Zhang Qian and held him prisoner for 10 years. By the time Zhang Qian reached Central Asia, the people there had made their peace with the nomads. So instead, Zhang Qian explored the wealthy and advanced civilizations left behind by Alexander the Great. When Zhang Qian returned to China, he brought the emperor wonderful tales of the cultures he had discovered to the west.

The emperor sent Zhang Qian back to the West to learn more about the regions. He got as far as Persia. One of the things he discovered was a large, strong breed of horses in the Fergana Valley of present-day Uzbekistan. These Celestial Horses were said to be so powerful that they sweat blood.

Eventually the Chinese were able to obtain some Celestial Horses for their armies. With his new war horses, the Chinese emperor's troops drove the nomads away in 101 BCE. Meanwhile, China's new ties with Central Asia sent traders and diplomats traveling between East and West. Today Zhang Qian is called the "Father of the Silk Road."

Far to the West during this time, the Roman Empire had been busy conquering all the lands surrounding the Mediterranean Sea. Regular trade started to develop between the Roman Empire and the Chinese Empire. But the two empires didn't deal with each other directly. Instead, their goods and money were passed along by the two empires that lay in between them. One was the Parthian Empire in Persia and the other was the Kushan Empire in Central Asia. Both of these empires grew rich by taxing traders on the Silk Road.

### **Marco Polo**

The best-known Silk Road traveller of all time was Marco Polo. Marco was born in Venice, Italy, in 1254 CE to a family of Silk Road merchants. His father and uncle were the first Europeans to meet Kublai Khan. When he was 17, Marco set out with them for China. It took the Polo's three years to reach Kublai Khan's capital. They had to cross the high Pamir Mountains and the deadly Taklamakan Desert. The emperor asked them to work for him and they stayed 17 years. Marco became one of Kublai Khan's trusted advisors.

After he returned in 1295, Marco joined the war effort on behalf of Venice and was captured by the Genoans. While imprisoned, he dictated stories of his travels to Rustichello da Pisa, a cellmate. He was released in 1299, became a wealthy merchant, married, and had three children. Despite the doubts, Marco's stories sent many generations of Europeans to explore the Silk Road for themselves.

### **The Silk Road Fades**

By 1368 CE, the Mongol Empire had collapsed. The Chinese Ming Dynasty took over. The Mings kicked out all foreigners and closed the Silk Road. They rebuilt the Great Wall, which had become a ruin of mud and logs, making it a stronger and bigger stone barrier.

Then in 1369, a Turk called Timur the Lame tried to revive the Mongolian Empire. One of Timur's ancestors was Genghis Khan. Like his ancestors, Timur destroyed many Silk Road cities. His attacks reached India, Persia, and the Middle East. But he also built magnificent buildings in his capital city of Samarkand. Timur's empire collapsed when he died in 1405.

In the West, Muslim rulers in what is now Turkey started banning Christian merchants from traveling along the Silk Road. So European traders had to find other ways to reach Asia. The Italian explorer Christopher Columbus tried sailing west from Spain—but instead of Asia he found the Americas.

Portuguese explorer Vasco da Gama sailed south around Africa and reached India. Both of these explorers opened up new trade routes by sea. The days of trade and travel cantering along the Silk Road were at an end.

### **After The Silk Road**

In the late 1800's two new empires became important in the Silk Road region—Britain and Russia. Britain ruled India while Russia controlled the Eurasian Steppe. They competed for control in a rivalry known as “The Great Game.”

Over the centuries, many Silk Road cities disappeared under the desert sands. When Russia and Britain sent spies to map out the area, they began stumbling across these ancient sites. The news brought archaeologists from around Europe and Asia. These eager scientists brought new attention to the region. But they also disturbed important sites and took valuable artifacts. China put a stop to this invasion by outsiders in the early 1920's.

### **My Thoughts**

After learning about the Silk Road, I learned that if the Road never existed then we wouldn't be here today. The Silk Road is what brought countries together for some time, which taught the people living in that century about different things all around the world and made everyone have the experience of the whole world.

# The Incredible History of The Silk Road

*The King's School Qianhai Shenzhen, Zhao, Juny – 11*

The Silk Road was not just a trade road, it was a bridge that connecting the technology of the East and West for over two thousand years. The inventor of the Silk Road belongs to the Western Han Dynasty—Zhang Qian. He went to West twice, with a heart that never stopped exploring, never was afraid, and never was a slacker in the whole way. He left a brilliant mark in the long river of history.

In 138 BC, the emperor Wu of Han wanted to be a team with Da Yue Zhi, so they can fight back to Xiong Nu, therefore the emperor told Zhang Qian to find Da Yue Zhi, then he took 100 people to travel on the path. This was the first time that China's messenger went to explore the West. They have just walked to the Hexi Corridor, and then they have been caught by the Xiong Nu, because in between Chang An and Da Yue Zhi, there was a nomadic people lived in the middle, the nomadic people love to rob every messenger that passed their land, they arrested Zhang Qian ten years, and helped him get married and have children, tried to soften his China will. But all these things didn't make up any feelings from Zhang Qian. Finally, Zhang Qian found a good chance, XiongNu was having a civil war, so he quickly ran out of Xiong Nu's control. Then he kept exploring West tried to find Da Yue Zhi.

They crossed the desert, tried not to be hungry, and after a long time he finally reached Da Yue Zhi. But now Da Yue Zhi's life was now amazing, so they don't want to fight with Xiong Nu again, because at first, they fought with Xiong Nu and they lost lots of time, therefore they didn't want to fight, Zhang Qian didn't finish his job, but he didn't come back with anything in his hand. He took notes of the Western city's position, local conditions and custom, the food, and the map of the whole Westerns place, helped West Han Dynasty learn about the West more easily. After four years, Western Han Dynasty told Zhang Qian to go to the West again. But now Chang An have already fought back Xiong Nu, so they control the Hexi Corridor, therefore now the way to the West was unblocked.

This time, Zhang Qian brought 300 men, they brought a bunch of silk, coins, sheep and cows. Now his goal was much clearer, he wanted to be a team with Wusun Kingdom, so they can be better of the Han Dynasty in the Western Regions, be a team with other Western country in the same time, so they could call each other faster. In the way, every Western country was very enthusiastic in receiving the messenger Zhang Qian, although they didn't get to the deal, because Wusun Kingdom was very messy, but Wusun Kingdom let their messenger went to Da yuan, Kang Ju, and Da Xia.

When Zhang Qian went back to Chang An, Wusun Kingdom's messenger gave him some special local product, and brought every Western country's intention with East. Zhang Qian went to West twice, although it was dangerous, but its meaning different each time. The first time he went to the West, he stayed in Xiong Nu ten years, just wanting to explore the West, helped the silk road make the first layer. The second time he went to the West, he relied on the might of the great Han Dynasty, this shows that he was the symbol of loyalty, and Han Dynasty moved toward the Western countries. Today, the Silk Road already overstepped the trading meaning, it was already a communication road. Zhang Qian, this amazing messenger, used its own feet made up the legend, used its own strength to make the Silk Road. His story, like a bright pearl, shines brightly in the long river of human history, maybe this was the only light that China people loved.

The Silk Road had lots of people exploring it, including Zhang Qian and another mystery men— Gan Ying, he kept on exploring the silk road within the Zhang Qian's explored. Also, Gan Ying, a great explorer of the Eastern Han Dynasty. As the trusted deputy of Ban Chao, he undertook the historic mission of connecting the East and the West, went on a long journey to the Roman Empire, known as Da qin in ancient China.

In 97 AD, Gan Ying have been told to start in the West Regions, they crossed the Pamir mountain, passed through the Kingdoms of Da Yuan and Da Yue Zhi, and traveled to the West all way the to the shores of the Persian Gulf. This was the western most point ever reached by an official Han mission, with every step into the unknown. Facing towering mountains, endless deserts, language barriers and cultural differences, Gan Ying never gave up. He held fast to the belief that "Nothing ventured, nothing gained", pushing the boundaries of Han China's exploration further west with unwavering willpower. Though he failed to reach Daqin, but his amazing work, helped all the Chinese people gained new insights. He took a very detailed note, became the precious

material for future to understand the West and the world. Gan Ying did not enjoy the glory of Ban Chao, but he left an incredible mark on the Silk

Road with his willpower. Just the man like Gan Ying gave the last mark of the Silk Road, he used his power actually explain why exploration was the soul of human progress. Gan Ying failed to reached Da qin, but that didn't count a loser, it was a promise written sand and stone, not a finite path, a fixed end, but an endless journey of connection. What began with Zhang Qian's bold "opening of the frontier" and to Ban Chao's protecting the road, then to Gan Ying exploring the unknown things.

The Silk Road was never just a trade route for silk, spices, or gold, it was a road that spreads technology and language. Today as we look back at Gan Ying's footsteps and the monks, and the explorer who followed, we seem that the Silk Road never truly faded. It lives on the global exchanges of our time, in the timeless truth that every journey, not a place on a map— it was a spirit in the human hearts, forever urging us to go further, to connect deeper and to build a world wheretverybody worked together by threads of courage and compassion. In my own opinion, I felt really proud of our China messenger, because they didn't get afraid by the Xiong NU, and when others didn't want to be a team with them, they won't just stop, they would keep exploring while waiting for their teammates, also when they met serious problem; they would just be calm and solve the problem quickly. It's good for China have these kinds of hero. I bet everyone can remember what they did before we lived in this beautiful country.

# The Silk Road— Not Only for Trade

*The King's School Qianhai Shenzhen, Zhuo, Alex – 12*

Over the past few centuries, the first impression of the Silk Road has been that of goods such as silk and spices. However, reducing this ancient and mysterious network to mere commerce conceals its profound heritage and cultural richness. The Silk Road was the world's first internet—a vast network of routes that spread not only spices and silk but also religions, technologies, and ideas. It was precisely this network, often simplified as a trade route by later generations, that effectively wove independent civilizations into an early form of globalization in an era without the internet.

The earliest Silk Road appeared in the Han Dynasty. (From 206 BC to 220 AD), this was mainly caused by Zhang Qian's diplomatic mission. At that time, he was sent to experience the alliance against nomadic tribes. Interestingly, he was imprisoned for 10 years in the process of establishing the alliance. His trip revealed the potential of trading with the West. The word "seidenstrasse" was coined by the German geographer Ferdinand von Richterhofen in 1877. Its translation into English is Silk Road. The Silk Road is actually a changing route connecting Chang'an (now Xi'an), Antioch, Constantinople and other places by land and sea.

Although this route was named after silk, the flow of goods was very diverse. China exported items such as porcelain, silk, and tea, while Central Asia sent special breeds of horses and jade, and Europe provided glass, gold, and silver. An even greater influence came from technology: gunpowder and papermaking were introduced to China, along with the cultivation of cotton and grapes. This exchange led to economic prosperity and created a demand for luxury goods.

The true genius of the Silk Road lay in its intangible impacts. Buddhism spread from India to China, transforming spirituality in East Asia, as seen in the Mogao Caves. Foods like pomegranates, wine, and sugar-making methods reached the Central Plains, changing dietary patterns. Tang dynasty court fashions such as Hu-style clothing, mounted archery, hats, and robes with reversed collars originated from Persia. Western musical instruments, such as the pipa and suona, were integrated into Central Plains music. These were all the invisible goods of the Silk Road. Knowledge of astronomy, mathematics, and medicine circulated freely. In art, Greek styles appeared in Gandhara Buddhist sculptures, while Chinese artistic influences affected Persian art. This was a dialogue of civilizations, not a monologue.

There have been many famous figures in history associated with the Silk Road. First is Zhang Qian, who is known as the 'Father of the Silk Road.' He was imprisoned in the Western Regions for ten years, during which he continuously gathered information about the area and even drew maps of the region while collecting intelligence. After ten years of captivity, he took advantage of the guards' negligence to escape and opened a stable route from Chang'an through the Western Regions to Central Asia. Next is Xuanzang, a 7th-century monk whose journey to India inspired 'Journey to the West,' and he also brought back scriptures from India. Marco Polo's accounts ignited Europe's fascination with the East.

Due to a variety of factors, the Silk Road declined in the 15th century. The rise of the Ottoman Empire blocked key overland routes; the Age of Exploration made maritime trade faster and cheaper; political fragmentation in Central Asia made overland travel dangerous. The final blow was the Ming Dynasty's inward turn, abandoning naval expeditions and foreign engagement.

The Silk Road never truly disappeared; its legacy lives on in the genetics, culture, and culinary traditions of the Eurasian continent. Today, China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) explicitly references this ancient network, building infrastructure that reconnects continents. While discussions about its geopolitical and economic impacts continue, the BRI underscores an enduring truth: connectivity shapes human destiny. The modern 'Digital Silk Road' of data and fiber continues the ancient tradition of linking the world.

In short, the Silk Road was the artery of premodern globalization. It reminds us that isolationism has historically been the exception, and cross-cultural exchange has been the main engine of human progress. In an age of resurgent nationalism and trade wars, the Silk Road offers a powerful lesson: when bridges are built—whether literally or metaphorically—civilizations engage in trade; they transform one another, creating a richer, more interwoven world.

# The Road That Changed The World

*Chinese YMCA Secondary School, Alam, Mahek – 14*

When I think about the Silk Road, I don't just see maps and ancient trade routes. I see stories—stories of real people who dared to leave their homes, face dangers, and cross deserts and mountains. They did it not only to trade goods but because they believed in something even bigger: connecting with others, sharing stories, and building a better future. Their journeys remind us that at the heart of all trade and travel lies a simple, universal desire—human connection.

Growing up, I loved hearing stories about distant lands—markets filled with spices, shiny silks, and treasures from faraway places. My grandmother would sit me down and tell tales of brave traders riding camels across endless sands or ships sailing across vast oceans. These stories made me wonder: what drives people to take such risks? What do they hope to find? I've come to believe that they're searching for something deeper—belonging, understanding, hope.

The history of the Silk Road is full of such stories—stories of ordinary people doing extraordinary things. Imagine a young man named Li Wei, from Chang'an, the great Chinese city. He's full of dreams and worries as he prepares for a long and dangerous journey. His heart beats with excitement and fear. He knows deserts, mountains, and bandits await him. But he also believes that his effort can help bring different worlds closer—through trade, yes, but also through friendship and understanding. His courage mirrors that of countless traders who crossed hostile terrains, driven by hope and perseverance.

On his way, Li Wei meets Amina from Baghdad. She's sharp and brave, navigating her way through complicated markets and treacherous routes. But she's also curious—about the strange lands and the people she encounters. She trades spices and textiles but also shares stories about her homeland. Her journey reminds me that the Silk Road was about more than goods; it was about stories, beliefs, and ideas traveling from one place to another—changing lives and shaping civilizations along the way.

Further along, the story takes us to Marco from Venice. He's eager to find new treasures and make new friends. But Marco isn't only after wealth; he's curious about the world. Every city he visits, every face he meets, teaches him something new. He begins to see that despite differences in language or religion, people everywhere share the same hopes—love, safety, and a better tomorrow.

But crossing the Silk Road was not easy. Traders faced enormous challenges every step of the way. The journey was long and exhausting, and natural obstacles made it even harder. Deserts stretched endlessly, with scorching heat that could drain a person's strength and ships that battled storms in the sea. Mountains loomed high, threatening to block the way, and freezing cold could turn a trek into a battle for survival. Bandits and hostile tribes attacked caravans, and political conflicts sometimes turned peaceful routes into dangerous battlegrounds. Many traders didn't make it, and countless stories of loss and hardship go untold. Yet, despite all these dangers, they kept going. They formed alliances, found new routes, and supported one another. Their resilience teaches us that even in the darkest moments, hope and teamwork can

help us overcome obstacles. Their courage inspires me, reminding me that perseverance and kindness are powerful tools in facing life's challenges.

Li Wei, Amina, and Marco joined forces with a shared purpose: to find a new path that could unite distant lands and bring hope to their people. They carefully mapped out routes through dangerous deserts and rugged mountains, using Li Wei's knowledge of ancient trade paths. Amina's skills in negotiation helped them gain safe passage and supplies from local tribes, fostering trust and alliances. Marco's ingenuity was vital—he built tools and repaired equipment, ensuring they could overcome obstacles like treacherous terrain and dwindling resources. Together, they faced storms, bandits, and harsh environments, supporting each other through every challenge. Their teamwork paid off when they discovered a hidden oasis—a fertile land rich with resources. This find not only provided sustenance but also opened new opportunities for trade and cultural exchange. Their perseverance and unity transformed their journey into a symbol of hope and resilience. They proved that collaboration could conquer adversity and that shared human connection was more powerful than borders or obstacles. In the end, they achieved what seemed impossible: forging a new route that would benefit many and inspiring others to believe in the strength of working together. Their journey became a lasting legacy of trust, hope, and human resilience.

By the 1400s, the importance of the Silk Road declined, replaced by sea routes and shifting empires. But its legacy remained. Today, we see that spirit in projects like the Belt and Road, where countries work together again—building roads, ports, and railways—not just to trade goods but to build understanding and friendship. It shows that the core values of the Silk Road—trust, curiosity, and cooperation—still matter.

But I just can't stop thinking about the new Silk Road. What tales might be told about the people setting out on this new adventure? What might this revived trade route accomplish? I see a platform for cooperation where countries come together to address urgent global issues. It might facilitate the sharing of sustainable practices, promoting both economic growth and environmental protection. In the future, I envision the silk Road facilitating knowledge sharing in addition to the flow of goods. Researchers from around the globe could unite to work on innovative projects that could advance disciplines like environmental science, technology, and medicine. The possibilities seem limitless as I write. The new silk Road is a ray of hope for a global world, not just a network of trade routes. It reminds us that we are all a part of a greater story and speaks to our common humanity.

Reflecting on all this, I realize that the most important lesson from the Silk Road is about human connection. It teaches us that progress isn't just about wealth; it's about sharing stories, exchanging ideas, and building relationships. Despite differences in language, culture, or background, we all share hopes for safety, love, and a better future. The Silk Road was more than a trade route—it was a reminder that kindness and curiosity can overcome borders and barriers, it is also a symbol of unity in diversity reminding us that connection is what truly sustains us.

# Continued Legacy: China's New Silk Road

*G.T. (Ellen Yeung) College, Chu, Cheuk Kiu – 14*

130 BCE, a vast network of trade routes, called the Silk Road, was developed. This Road is not a simple, single road connecting from East to West, but a joint of different trade routes. The Silk Road facilitates the exchange of spices, silk and other goods, marking the start of religion and technology exchange. This trade route shapes civilization across Europe and Asia, interrogating the Chinese government to preserve it until now.

However, the Silk Road wasn't the first trading route across Eurasia, routes like the Steppe route and Amber route were first discovered and developed. Established during 130 BCE, the Han Dynasty, this road has overcome many engineering obstacles and challenges. During the phase of building, the road stretched across the QingZang Plateau, causing many engineers to face the harsh conditions such as dangerous terrains, sandstorms and altitude sickness. Gathering different trade routes was hard, especially without any advanced technology, however, Emperor Wu managed to establish the Silk Road, striving through the hardships.

The Silk Road may be called "The Silk Road", however, it doesn't only transport silk, it is also in charge of other transportation of goods, such as precious metals, ceramics, spices, and even knowledge transfer! Not only does it transport goods, it also embraces the start for cultural exchange. During the Silk Road's most active period, more eastern religions such as Buddhism, Taoism, and Islam were brought to Europe, whereas other Western religions such as Christianity, Catholicism, and Judaism were brought and spread across Asia. Languages were also exchanged through the Silk Road. One of the most important examples is the exchange of Chinese and Persian, as these two diverse cultures meet, many different types of languages were invented.

The Silk Road wasn't as busy as it was now. During the mid 15th century, the Silk Road was closed due to political arguments. As the world progressed into the Age of Discovery, many Europeans established direct sea routes between Eurasia, reducing the use of the Silk Road. As the development of water transport flourished, the Silk Road began to demolish slowly and by the 19th century, the Silk Road was no longer as significantly important in the aspect of economics.

Some of the remaining cultural routes are now part of new, modern infrastructure projects such as China's Belt and Road Initiative. Although the Silk Road hasn't been as important and essential as it was in the past, its legacy still lives on until today.

# Silk Road 2.0 – The Legacy Lives on

*G.T. (Ellen Yeung) College, Tsang, Jin Yi – 14*

A vast network of tedious routes, stretching from China to Europe and Africa, both by land across deserts, cities and mountains and by sea, battling fierce storms and notorious pirates, is the legendary Silk Road, a pathway crucial in the exchange of goods, culture, technology and much more. As time progresses, the web of trails becomes more extensive and more developed than ever. The New Silk Road, also known as the Belt and Road Initiative, where as Belt stands for land and Road stands for sea. It not only promotes international trade but also boosts connectivity and economic cooperation with various countries around the globe.

Today, as the New Silk Road beats once again, its pulse is much stronger. Steel tracks and concrete roads cover hoofprints left by camels for trains and trucks. Junk ships need not depend on the wind direction and speed; container ships can travel anywhere, anytime. With the invention of aeroplanes, trading is now faster and more convenient than ever. Instead of using major landmarks to guide their way, satellites pinpoint the exact location of merchants. Even though much has changed since ancient times, the essence remains unwavering: to connect, to exchange with others, broaden our horizons, and ultimately benefit all.

In China, the city of Xi'an still stands proudly as the starting point for both the Silk Road and the Belt and Road Initiative. Xi'an, once named Chang'an, was the capital of the Han and Tang Dynasties, where the Silk Road was at its peak. Towering walls surround the city, protecting its trading activities. Streets were filled with new types of spices and crops, with foreigners introducing new types of religion and advanced knowledge. Merchants pack precious silk as well as tea onto the back of camels, ready to set out once again. These were the result of the Silk Road – exchanging equally and harmoniously. After more than 2,000 years, it became the starting point for the New Silk Road's Economic Belt. It serves as a major logistics hub, connecting numerous countries such as Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan through the China–Europe Railway Express. In modern times, instead of mainly fostering exchange between countries, China invests in undeveloped countries by participating in the building of infrastructure and providing financial and technical aid. The countries, in return, help China expand its market in the country and sell resources at a discounted price. Isn't the New Silk Road a win-win strategy?

The Maritime Silk Road also serves as an essential link to countries that cannot be reached or could be reached quickly by sea, such as the Philippines and Africa. Apart from trading goods like porcelain and cotton, China once imported a giraffe from Africa in the Ming dynasty! Developing the Maritime Silk Road also facilitates the economic and cultural growth of coastal countries, such as Guangzhou and Fuzhou, shaping the prosperous cities they are today. These cities continue to act as an indispensable maritime route for the Belt and Road Initiative, with Guangzhou acting as a worldwide port for massive container traffic and Fuzhou as a core marine hub for the New Silk Road's Road Initiative.

The New Silk Road not only transports goods and provides assistance, but it also allows the exchange of ideas and knowledge between countries. One key example is the University Alliance of the New Silk Road. This programme funds and allows students from participating countries in the Belt and Road Initiative to study at local Chinese Universities, and for local Chinese students to study abroad. This helps nurture a new generation of cross-cultural professionals, which enhances communication between countries and increases job opportunities. China also welcomes workers to engage in professional training on the essential skills needed for collaborative projects, such as railway and construction management. There is also the Annual Belt and Road Forum, which invites leaders and experts to discuss important matters in every aspect. This allows a wide overview of events happening now and methods in tackling problems, building up a gigantic think tank.

In conclusion, the Silk Road, both ancient and modern, symbolises humanity's connectivity and growth. Once camels carried silk across deserts and ships tackled storms, today trains and planes link nations into one. The New Silk Road, or the Belt and Road Initiative, continues this legacy by continuous investment, fostering trade, and encouraging cultural and educational exchange. Cities like Xi'an, Guangzhou, and Fuzhou remain vital hubs, blending history with modern progress. At its core, the Silk Road is about cooperation and mutual benefit, weaving countries together into a shared future where commerce, knowledge, and trust flow freely across borders.



# Non-fiction

Group 4

# The Romanticism and Myth of the Silk Road vs. The Dark Side of Connectivity

*Carmel School – Elsa High School, Fisher, Ari – 17*

The Silk Road is frequently portrayed as a peaceful exchange that linked the civilisations of East and West. The silk road is often celebrated as a route along which silk, spices, and ideas flowed freely, thus promoting the globalization of culture and economic prosperity. This however, oversimplifies the nature of the silk road and its consequences. The Silk Road was not a single road but instead was a vast and evolving network of land and ocean routes that connected East Asia, Central Asia, the Middle East, Europe, and parts of Africa over many centuries (Silk Road Trade Route, 2026). While this network facilitated trade, cultural exchange, and technological advances, it also produced destructive outcomes that are failed to be acknowledged in romanticised accounts. Connectivity did not only bring societies closer together – it integrated them in ways that intensified both opportunity and vulnerability. Although the Silk Road is often romanticised as a peaceful network of trade and cultural exchange, its true legacy lies in the dual nature of connectivity, which fostered economic interdependence and early globalisation while also enabling the spread of devastating diseases and technologies that intensified warfare.

One of the most significant benefits of the Silk Road was its role in creating economic interdependence between distant regions which contributed to cooperation and stability (Wikipedia contributors, 2026). The Silk Road was never controlled by a single empire for any sustained period. Instead, it passed through a number of political entities, which all eased the flow of goods and profits. Some of the things that spread through the route were Chinese silk, Indian spices, Central Asian horses, Middle Eastern glassware, and European metals. No region could dominate the system without the cooperation of others, and as each relied on neighbouring states for access, transit, and protection.

As a result of this interdependence, cities such as Samarkand, Bukhara, and Merv thrived by providing storage, taxation, security, and services to merchants through caravanserais parks. (*Caravanserais: Cross-roads of Commerce and Culture Along the Silk Roads | Silk Roads Programme*, n.d.) Their economic survival depended on the trade brought by the Silk Road, which encouraged local authorities to protect caravans rather than disrupt them. Larger empires similarly benefited from taxing trade routes, making stability along these corridors economically advantageous. Warfare that severely disrupted trade threatened not only merchants but also state revenues, reducing incentives for prolonged or indiscriminate conflict.

As a result, periods of relative stability emerged across regions connected by the Silk Road. While conflict was not absent, it was often limited, since sustained instability risked undermining economic prosperity. This stability was not the product of idealism or a shared commitment to peace, but of pragmatic self-interest. States and cities cooperated because the cost of disruption outweighed the benefits of aggression. In this way, the Silk Road challenges assumptions that pre-modern trade networks were inherently fragile or chaotic. Instead, it demonstrates how connectivity can create stabilising pressures through aligned economic incentive across political and cultural boundaries. This outcome represents a constructive consequence of connectivity that is often overlooked in simplified narratives of the Silk Road.

Beyond aiding economic interdependence, the Silk Road also functioned as an early form of globalisation, and thus reshaped societies through sustained cross-continental exchange (Vanham, 2019). The Silk Road enabled continuous movement of goods, ideas, technologies, and resources over long periods of time. These created links between regions that transformed once distant societies into partners.

The exchange facilitated by the Silk Road extended to a plethora of different items (*What Was Traded on the Silk Road and Why (10 Items)*, 2024). Agricultural products spread across regions, altering diets and farming practices and thus increased agricultural productivity. Technologies such as papermaking, printing, and navigation techniques moved between civilisations thus transforming administration, education, and communication. Systems of knowledge, including mathematics, astronomy, and medicine, were exchanged and adapted,

contributing to intellectual development across Eurasia. Religious and philosophical ideas also travelled along these routes, which reshaped a multitude of cultures such as Buddhism, Islam, and Christianity spread into new regions.

What distinguishes the Silk Road as an early form of globalisation is the permanence of these changes (Lui, 2024). Over time, this created interconnected economic and cultural systems that transcended political borders. Connectivity exacerbated the reach and impact of innovation, allowing developments in one region to transform societies thousands of kilometres away. This process accelerated progress and integration on a scale previously unseen in human history.

However, this same connectivity also increased exposure to shared risks. As societies became more interconnected, local developments could rapidly acquire global consequences (*The Spread of Disease Along the Silk Roads / Silk Roads Programme*, n.d.). The Silk Road thus demonstrates that globalisation is not inherently beneficial, but rather amplifies both positive and negative outcomes. While connectivity enabled unprecedented advancement, it also made societies vulnerable to crisis. This duality is central to understanding the true legacy of the Silk Road.

The most devastating example of this vulnerability was the spread of disease, particularly the Black Death in the fourteenth century (Brook, 2020). The Silk Road's dense networks of trade and travel provided ideal conditions for the spread of the disease across Eurasia. Merchants, animals, and goods moved regularly between regions, while trade hubs and caravan parks concentrated large numbers of people in confined spaces. These conditions allowed diseases to spread rapidly and efficiently between populations with little or no immunity.

The bubonic plague is believed to have originated in East or Central Asia before spreading westward along interconnected trade routes into the Middle East, North Africa, and Europe. Fleas carried by rodents travelled with caravans and ships, while infected individuals unknowingly transported the disease from one settlement to another. The infrastructure that sustained the Silk Road made containment nearly impossible, transforming what may have begun as a regional outbreak into a transcontinental catastrophe. Within a relatively short period, the Black Death caused massive population loss, killing millions and devastating entire communities.

The consequences of the plague extended far beyond mortality. Labour shortages destabilised economies, leading to shifts in wages, land ownership, and social structures. Traditional hierarchies were weakened as surviving workers gained greater bargaining power, while fear and uncertainty eroded trust in religious and political institutions. In many regions, social cohesion broke down, and violence against marginalised groups intensified as societies sought scapegoats for the disaster. These effects illustrate that the impact of disease was not limited to health, but reshaped economic, social, and political systems.

The spread of the Black Death, however, was not an accidental by-product of the Silk Road, but a structural consequence of connectivity. The same networks that facilitated trade and integration also enabled pathogens to move freely across continents. This undermines romanticised portrayals of the Silk Road as a benign force for exchange, revealing that connectivity introduced unprecedented vulnerability alongside prosperity. The Black Death demonstrates how integration can transform local crises into global disasters, reinforcing the dual nature of the Silk Road's legacy.

In addition to disease, the Silk Road facilitated the spread of gunpowder technology, thus transforming warfare and intensifying violence (Beyer, 2025). Gunpowder was initially developed in China, where it was used for a range of purposes before being adapted for military application. Through trade and military contact along Silk Road networks, knowledge of gunpowder weapons gradually spread westward. As this technology was adopted by states across Eurasia, it fundamentally altered the nature of warfare.

The introduction of firearms and artillery undermined traditional military structures and fortifications. Castles and city walls that had once provided security became vulnerable to siege weaponry, while battles became

increasingly lethal and impersonal. Warfare shifted from relatively limited engagements between elite forces to large-scale conflicts capable of devastating entire populations. States that mastered gunpowder technology gained significant military advantages, contributing to the rise of powerful centralised governments capable of sustaining standing armies and prolonged wars.

The spread of gunpowder increased the scale and efficiency of violence, leading to higher civilian casualties and greater destruction of infrastructure. This transformation of warfare had profound social and political consequences, as military power became increasingly central to state authority. The Silk Road thus played a critical role in amplifying humanity's capacity for violence

The Silk Road facilitated the exchange of many technologies that enhanced productivity, governance, and communication. However, the spread of gunpowder illustrates how connectivity could also magnify destructive potential. This contrast reinforces the argument that connectivity is not inherently positive, but amplifies human intentions and capabilities, whether constructive or harmful.

The Silk Road was neither a network of peaceful exchange nor a purely destructive force. Its significance lies in its role as a system of connectivity that reshaped the world in complex and enduring ways. Through economic interdependence, it encouraged cooperation and relative stability across diverse regions. Through sustained exchange, it functioned as an early form of globalisation, integrating societies and accelerating cultural and technological development. At the same time, this same connectivity enabled the spread of devastating diseases and militarised technologies that intensified human suffering on a global scale.

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# Flavours of Culture: How the Silk Road Brought Spice, Sweetness and Story to Chinese Life

*Diocesan Girls' School, Hung, Ka Lo Valerie – 15*

Pepper. Simple, spicy seasoning, sprinkled over Pork Belly Soup to elevate its rich, savoury flavour, seared with beef to spice it up. Black pepper is a quintessential element of many dishes, a pungent staple in every household. It is impossible to envision Chinese cuisine without this commonplace component of our pantries. Yet, for our earlier ancestors, it was a completely foreign concept. Black pepper did not grow on Chinese soil, and it never would have if not for the vast, connective network we now call the Silk Road.

Until two millennia ago, a metaphorical wall divided Asia and Europe. There were trade routes connecting the two sides of the Earth, but they were mostly on a smaller scale and had a slim selection of options. Flow of goods and knowledge was constantly barricaded by formidable landscapes, political fragmentation and the inherent inefficiencies of travel in the ancient ages. Interaction, if any, was scarce and disconnected, with each side of the wall being completely ignorant about the world on the other side.

Then came the start of the Han Dynasty. In the hopes of building commercial ties and an alliance against the nomadic Xiongnu, Emperor Wu dispatched his imperial envoy Zhang Qian to distant lands. Along with troops of men, Zhang also brought with him yards of silk, ebony lacquerware, and crates of tea. While the Emperor's dreams of uniting against the Xiongnu were dashed, the journey and the six that followed brought back extensive knowledge, rich wines and all varieties of exotic fruits from the prosperous people beyond the border. The invaluable intelligence inspired Emperor Wu to set up trade and diplomatic relations with the West. Through military campaigns against the Xiongnu, he secured the Hexi Corridor and a stable and safe route for trade to flourish, which later served as the basis of the Silk Road. The wall between the two continents fell. The Silk Road emerged, toppling old boundaries and opening new pathways.

The reach and impact of the Silk Road were sprawling and unprecedented. The land routes and sea routes of the Silk Road extended over 6400 kilometres, connecting Chang'an to Persia, and then to the Roman Empire. Trade exploded from one-sided transactions to a mutual demand for 'exotic' products. The West carted cart after cart of glassware, precious metals, and medicines to Asia. Meanwhile, Europeans lusted after soft, sleek silk, aromatic spices and delicate porcelain courtesy of the East. The silk trade, in particular, was particularly successful. The much sought-after fabric was highly valuable yet lightweight, making it one of the most profitable merchandise items traders could sell.

Yet the name 'Silk Road' has misleading implications. The etymology of the term dates back to the 19th century, a good 2 millennia after the ancient route first began. In 1877, German geographer and traveller Ferdinand von Richthofen first coined the term 'Silk Road'. It became a widely accepted term for the network of Asian trade routes, to the point where it was used even by Chinese scholars. However, multiple historians have expressed dissent over the naming of the so-called 'Silk Road'. Venerated archaeologist Warrick Ball claims that it would have been more appropriate for the network of roads to be named the 'Jade Road', for its initial use, or after the lucrative and far more consequential spice trade. The generalized name for the Silk Road is a grave oversimplification of what it truly embodies. Contrary to what its name suggests, the 'Silk Road' was actually an extensive web of trade routes with both East and West importing and exporting a diverse range of goods.

And amongst this long list of products was food. Merchants brought crops and spices to barter in different countries. While they were less easily transported, there were some species of fruit that the eastern and western hemispheres did not share, making them highly prized on the other side of the world. For Western countries, these included peaches, apricots, plums and cherries. But direct sale and exchange of fruit was not the only way they spread from land to land, with one such example being the humble apple. Although wild apples had existed in China for centuries, they had not been cultivated properly. However, travellers carried and consumed modern, domesticated apples, discarding the cores along the dirt roads. These grew into new trees that cross-pollinated

with native species in China, producing hybrids with larger size, firmer flesh and better flavour. Once farmers noticed the many desirable traits in the fruits, they began propagating the strains through grafting, a technique they also used to cultivate crops they bought from traders.

Another type of crop spread through the Silk Road was vegetables. While long-distance trade focused heavily on high value-to-weight luxury goods, vegetables were crucial for regional markets. Foodstuffs helped various communities and empires meet local subsistence and demand, and as people grew accustomed to new foods, demand grew, and with it trade and cultivation. The Chinese Gingerroot travelled from its original growing grounds to other parts of Asia through the Silk Road, as travellers carried it on their journeys for culinary and medicinal uses. As for the West, they introduced onions, garlic and rhubarb to China. Notably, rhubarb, with its antibacterial, anti-fibrotic, anti-inflammatory and anticancer properties, was used as a potent herb in Chinese medicine to treat a variety of conditions. Chinese villagers took the same initial ingredients from Europe and placed their own spin on things, concocting new, innovative ways to use and prepare them.

Seasoning also spread through the Silk Road. Despite being needed only in small quantities, the importance of spices should not be underestimated. Pungent and flavourful, they transform the blandest of dishes into something worth tasting. Most spices were shipped from India, and black pepper was no exception. The first appearance of black pepper in Chinese texts was in the third century. Then, it was named as *hujiao*, or “foreign pepper”, as per the conventional naming system of foreign agricultural produce, with names starting with Chinese characters meaning ‘foreign’. In elite circles of the Song and Yuan dynasties, black pepper, or ‘black gold’, even became a status symbol. It was the spice of life for the wealthy, with it being valued so highly that diplomats would offer tributes of pepper to Chinese rulers. Marco Polo claimed that one city could burn through 43 loads (one load weighted roughly 223 pounds) of the spice in one day, testifying to its immense popularity.

However, when pepper first emerged in Chinese society as a medicine, it was uncommon among the populace. Trade, after all, took time and effort, and most goods sold were luxury goods with heavy price tags. It was only until the Ming Dynasty, when maritime routes became more robust that black pepper became a conventional ingredient. Political instability on land and advancements in maritime technology meant that ships became a far safer and more efficient method of travel and trade. Fleets allowed merchants to carry more crates, increasing the supply of black pepper and making it more accessible for the average person.

Besides ingredients, merchants also carried knowledge about their countries’ cooking styles. For instance, westerners settling down in Tang China set up cake shops in Chang’an, selling *Biluo*, a translucent, pillow-shaped cake that allows the vibrant filling inside to be seen. Han General Ban Chao is also heavily associated in Chinese legends with bringing back roasted flatbreads, or *hubing* from Central Asia. Increased interaction allowed culinary techniques to mingle and merge.

The Silk Road was more than just a spindly path silk merchants took to reach the West. The contributions it made to culture and Chinese gastronomy, with it giving us apples and rhubarb and flatbreads and the simple, common black pepper. Much of the normality in our lives is built on the establishment of the Silk Road. Without the travelling tradesmen who carried caravans of crates to us, Chinese cuisine would not be as flavoursome and full-bodied as it is today. We owe much to the Silk Road for the pleasing fullness we get after a hearty, traditional meal.

# The Origins of the Silk Road

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## Introduction

Any biography of the Silk Road must entail the original purpose of an empire to utilise such a pathway – warfare. From the original Persian Royal Road to the conquest of the Mongols, warfare became the primary catalyst for the development of the Silk Road, as war has been the mother of necessity, not of invention itself, but of the accelerated development and deployment of certain technologies. As a result, a recurring theme of warfare will be explored in this article, stemming from the profound impact of warfare as a catalyst for human development.

## 550–530 BC, The Achaemenid Persian Empire

While the term 'Silk Road' properly refers to the trans-Eurasian exchange network that flourished under the Han and later empires, its essential infrastructure – the concept of a state-maintained, secure, long-distance corridor for communication and commerce was first perfected on a continental scale by the Achaemenid Persian Empire with its Royal Road. Under Darius I, the Royal Road stretched from Susa to Sardis, a large distance of 2,500 kilometres. Although primarily used by kings' messengers to travel conveniently throughout the vast empire, it later became useful to merchants and explorers, facilitating commerce throughout the region. Stretches of the Royal Road later became part of the Silk Road, such as the Great Khurasan Road.

The Achaemenid blueprint for imperial infrastructure proved its enduring value. However, it remained a system largely confined to the spheres of Western and Central Asia. The catalyst for transforming these disparate regional networks into a coherent trans-Eurasian exchange system would come from the east, driven by the strategic imperatives of the Han Dynasty. Just as Persian kings built roads to secure their empire from rebellion, Emperor Wu of Han would seek to secure his empire's frontier by looking west, setting in motion a chain of events that would permanently link the Chinese and Persian spheres of influence.

## 138–114 BC, The Han Dynasty

The Han Emperor Wu's initial motivation was to find military allies against the Xiongnu. His envoy, Zhang Qian, failed in this mission but returned with crucial intelligence on Central Asia and, most importantly, news of the superior 'Heavenly Horses' of Ferghana. Wu recognised that these horses were the key to defeating the Xiongnu cavalry. To acquire and secure such an advantage, he first needed to control the gateway to Central Asia—the Hexi Corridor, then under Xiongnu control. Through military power, he seized the region and embarked on a colossal project of military engineering that mirrored the Persian Royal Road's state-controlled pathways. Just as the Achaemenids built the Royal Road with waystations and garrisons to ensure security and communication, Wu transformed the Hexi Corridor into a fortified appendage of the Han state. Constructed there were sequences of walled commanderies, soldier-farmed colonies, a network of watchtowers and beacon systems that stretched far beyond the main cities to protect their trade routes. Thus lay the foundation of the creation of the Silk Road, stemming from the desire of the Han for greater economic and military strength. Through the consistent annual deployment of envoys travelling across Central Asia, Emperor Wu began the network of trade routes from Chang'an to major trading capitals such as Baghdad.

## 27BC, The Establishment of the Roman Empire, Rome Conquers Egypt

Arriving in the Mediterranean Sea through Greek traders in 400 BC, silk quickly became a sensation in Rome, generating a great demand among the wealthy by the 1st century BC. Seeking more of this eastern delight, the Romans gradually began to expand eastward to satisfy the demand for silk, establishing connections with China through the Parthian Empire in Ctesiphon, which became a key middleman between China and Rome for silk.

It was during this period that a route began to emerge, connecting eastern Chang'an to the western Mediterranean. From this trade, the term "Silk Road" was coined. Accelerated through the protection of Han infrastructure, silks and tea began to be reliably supplied in Central Asia, while Roman conquests in Egypt and the Near East created a wealthy, stable western market with an unquenchable desire for eastern luxuries.

The Roman pursuit of eastern luxuries led to direct military confrontation, most catastrophically at the Battle of Carrhae in 53 BC, where Crassus's legions were annihilated by Parthian cavalry. This marked the beginning of a sharp revelation for the Romans that a formidable imperial power guarded the lucrative overland routes from Central Asia. Through this direct contact, these wars precipitated the negotiation over trade rights, obtaining greater access to the eastern markets of China.

The conquest of Egypt in 30BC caused regular communications and trade between China, Southeast Asia, India, the Middle East, Africa, and Europe to blossom on an unprecedented scale. Through this, the Roman Empire inherited eastern trade routes that were a part of the Silk Road from earlier Hellenistic powers and the Arabs. These trade routes expanded to a point by the time of Emperor Augustus, up to 120 ships sailed annually from Roman Egypt to India.

It was not until 113 AD, during Good Emperor Trajan's reign of prosperity where the Romans prioritised the defeat of Parthia, where consecutive eastern conquests led to the capture of the Parthian capital Ctesiphon. Through the capture of Ctesiphon, Rome could now avoid previously placed Parthian taxes on Chinese goods. Although later recaptured by the Parthians by the time of the rule of Hadrian, it incentivised the Romans to seek alternative routes to avoid taxation by the Parthians, accelerating the development of maritime trade routes through the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean. An important factor to note about the Romans during this period was that their knowledge of the "Seres" (Chinese) remained vague due to the intentional limitations placed by the Parthians acting as intermediaries, which maintained the "relay" nature of the route, where merchants only travelled a short distance relative to the length of the Silk Road.

#### 6th–14th century AD, Rise of the Byzantine Empire

Sharing the classic Roman love of silk, the Byzantine Empire faced a dire strategic crisis. With the silk traded flowing through both the opposing Persians and the Huns, each exchange strangled Constantinople's supply and treasury. The emperor at that time was Emperor Justinian I, who responded to this issue by dispatching two Nestorian Monks on a confidential trip to China. The purpose of this journey was not to form alliances or conquer, but a theft. Their objective was to steal the renowned silkworm eggs from China to begin their own silk production. With silkworms first being of use for the production of silk in the 3rd millennium BC, with the credit of discovery being the Yangshao culture within Neolithic China.

With a duration of around 2 years, the monks managed to smuggle silkworm eggs back into Constantinople, creating numerous silk factories across the Byzantine Empire. This caused a break in the previous Chinese–Persian monopoly, where the Chinese and Persians imposed heavy taxes on the silk trade. As a result of this, the silk trade became the core of the Roman economy for the next 6 centuries until the events of the Fourth Crusade in 1204, beginning the demise of the Roman culture as a whole.

#### 7th–10th Century AD, The Tang Dynasty – A Golden Age Arises

Following centuries of fragmentation, the Tang Dynasty's reunification of China in the 7th century revived the Silk Road through renewed military expansion. Under Emperor Taizong and his successors, the Chinese resumed the Han's westward expansionist strategy, stretching their military power into Central Asia. By battling the Eastern and Western Turk Khaganates, the Tang began its ruthless conquest across Asia. The establishment of the Anxi Protectorate in 640 AD also further complemented the Silk Road. Being based in Kucha, it controlled the Tarim Basin's oasis cities, creating a haven for merchants and traders alike in the form of the Four Garrisons of Anxi. Now stretching far beyond the previous limitative Hexi Corridor, the Tangs stretched their control and

taxation toward the Pamir Mountains, mirroring the previously Hanist state-controlled security, allowing trade and the economy to flourish and blossom.

A new *Pax Sinica* had now been developed – Through the efforts of the Tangs, the Silk Road had now reached its golden age during the first millennium. However, credit cannot be given to the Tangs alone. Whilst the Tang armies marched forward, Sogdian merchants tagged along, acting as intermediaries, translators and bankers. Finally settling in the Tang capital Chang'an, they developed a western cacophony of languages, faiths and religions in the cosmopolitan metropolis.

However, even the greatest may suffer defeats. During the pinnacle of the Tang Empire, the Tangs faced an astonishing defeat – Upon the western-flowing Talas River, they met the expansionist Abbasid Caliphate. Seeking to obtain the renowned Ferghana Valley for the everlasting “Heavenly Horses”, the Tangs engaged the Abbasids in warfare. Being initially engaged in a stalemate, a defection in the Turk allies led to a decisive victory for the Abbasids. This defeat led to the capture of Chinese papermakers, who spread their technology across the Islamic world and Europe.

The most decisive defeat that deteriorated Tangist superiority was the An Lushan rebellion of 755–763. Led by An Lushan of Turk origin, Chang'an was captured. To respond to this rebellion, the Tang were forced to withdraw the Four Garrisons of Anxi. A crucial result of this rebellion was the shattering of the traditional tax base, forcing the Tangs to rely on revenue from international trade and merchant support from maritime trade routes from ports such as Guangzhou. Slowly, the state began to crumble under the stress of military extension and internal collapse, ending the Tang supremacy over the supervision of the Silk Road for over 2 centuries.

#### 8th–13th Century AD, the Islamic Empire

The collapse of the Tang dynasty in the 10th century did not decimate the Silk Road – Its administration instead transferred from the fading Tang dynasty to the Islamic Abbasid Caliphates, who had already previously defeated the Tangs in the battle of Talas in 751 AD. Whilst the Tangs retreated from the An Lushan revolution, the Abbasids entered a golden age of their own. With the Silk Road commerce centre shifting decisively to Baghdad, the capital, it was placed at the nexus of routes intertwining from China, India, and the Byzantine Empire. Under the Abbasids, warfare continued to be the main benefactor of trade. With the territory from the Mediterranean to the Oxus under a unified government, it meant that goods could travel under a single regime, currency and language. This new structure was not caused by the sweet tongues of politicians – it was carved using the gleaming edge of the sword in battle.

Under this haven, Persian and Arab merchants thrived. By perfecting the previously existing “relay” system, where goods were exchanged numerous times throughout the journey in key cities such as Baghdad, Samarkand, and Merv. Stemming from the militarised nature of the Abbasid empire, the true products traded in this system were not in silk, but technology transfers. Through the previous Battle of Talas, paper had begun to appear westward during this period. Now, other Chinese inventions followed the same martial pathways: gunpowder appeared in Islamic treatises on warfare by the 13th century, and the compass revolutionised navigation. Islamic technologies also travelled eastward, such as the advancements in Damascus steelmaking, astronomy, and medicine.

Again, as predicted by the Chinese writer Luo GuanZhong in the classic novel *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, “*The empire, long divided, must unite; long united, must divide*”. Over the course of numerous centuries, the Abbasids would face their own fragmenting process. Through the events of the Crusades from the 11th to the 13th centuries, tolls and insecurities began to occur. By the 12th century, the Silk Road became a lucrative but fraying patchwork for competing kingdoms.

## 10th–14th Century AD, Development of Maritime Routes by the Song Empire

Whilst the Abbasids consolidated the overland trade routes under a single Islamic sphere, the reunification of China by the Song Dynasty in 960 caused a significant shift in the Silk Road. Because the Song Dynasty was incapable of further development along the Silk Road, it was hemmed in by powerful nomadic tribes to the north. By military necessity, the Songs attempted a radical strategy. They turned their formidable ingenuity to the seas, transforming the Maritime Silk Road into a reliable lifeline.

From the inception, the Song dynasty faced strong adversities that dictated its economic policy, with the Liao Dynasty to the north–east, the Jin dynasty and later the Mongols to the north. From the humiliating treaty of Shanyuan to the Liao, and later, the catastrophe of the JiangKing incident, where the Jin tribes conquered the Song capital and emperor, forcing the royal court to flee southwards, establishing the Southern Song dynasty. The result of these conflicts was that the Chinese were now severed from the overland routes from the Hexi Corridor into Central Asia.

Without their northern tax base and vast armies required for constant defensive maintenance for the empire, the Song Dynasty decided to turn to the seas, dominating the seas in commerce and trade. Thus, they established 3 main ports – Guangzhou, Fuzhou, and Quanzhou. By applying taxation through the sea, the Songs were able to directly use these funds to support the defence against the Jins at the Yellow River. In this period, the Song dynasty created many innovations, mostly as a result of the catalyst that is warfare, with the magnetic compass, the development of advanced shipbuilding, and the consistent use of gunpowder in battles.

Inevitably, their naval dominance would attract much attention, particularly from the Mongols, who were then the greatest military force in history, ruling one quarter of the world population. What followed was the Mongol–Song wars, which, to the Song Dynasty, were four gruelling decades of struggle and downfall, with the conclusion being at the decisive Battle of Yamen in 1279. When the last Song loyalists were defeated, the Mongols embraced the maritime trade routes, inheriting the Song navy and ports to fuel their own global ambitions.

## 13th–14th Century AD, The Mongols

Under the Yuan Dynasty, the Mongols did not choose between overland or maritime trade routes – they selected both. Seizing control of both China in the east and Persia in the west, they became the first single political authority across the entire span of the Eurasian exchange network. This was defined as *Pax Mongolia* – A period of peace caused by war. The Mongols did not simply conquer territory – they demolished every intermediate power that taxed or threatened trade in Asia. They also initiated the Yam, a courier and relay network that stretched throughout the Silk Road. Within it lay yam stations, which provided fresh horses, food, shelter, and security. Being initially built for the military, it became the fastest and safest highway for merchants in history. Passports were created by the Khan, licenses to travel under imperial protection from the Yellow Sea to the Black Sea. Understanding that taxed trade generated greater wealth than sporadic plunder, they actively promoted commerce throughout their empire. Assistance offered includes the creation of standard weights and measures, low–interest loans for caravans, and the deployment of soldiers throughout the Silk Road for the safety of merchants. This security enabled famous journeys, such as those of Marco Polo and Rabban Bar Sauma.

However, this *Pax Mongolia* was inherently fragile. Being inherently dependent on the desires and authority of the Mongolian Royal Family, by the 14th century, the empire had split into numerous rival khanates. Another factor was the arrival of the Black Death, which spread through the Mongol–administered Silk Road, demolishing cities and empires in its wake, demoralising the concept of the Silk Road as a whole.

The final fatal blow to the overland Silk Road's supremacy was the rise of the Ottoman Empire and European states, who, inspired by the legendary wealth of the East, were described by travellers like Polo – they sought to replicate the Song Dynasty's strategic pivot on a global scale. They would combine the Mongol's ruthless ambition with the Song's naval technology, opening a new, oceanic chapter in warfare and exchange that would permanently eclipse the ancient caravan roads, ending the era of the Silk Road as we know it today.

## Present–Day

Today, a modern reincarnation of the ancient Silk Road has been created in the form of the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which was developed along the same great roads and seas of the Silk Road. On the same routes where camels and horses towed great caravans, now lie endless thick rails of steel alloy where only the swift wisp of the bullet trains is perceived. The BRI complements a “21st Century Maritime Silk Road”, centred on the development of port and maritime infrastructure, as well as finances and constructs railways, highways, and power plants, facilitating economic growth all around the globe.

## Conclusion

The Silk Road, with both its contemporary and ancient forms, stands as a powerful testimony to humanity’s striving for economic and technological growth and an enduring drive to connect, trade and interact across mammoth expanses of land. This story is not of a single route – it is of the perpetual evolution of exchange throughout human history. Whilst most infrastructure and people throughout this history have collapsed or rested, the core principle remained throughout the whole course of the Silk Road’s history – pathways are constructed to allow goods and innovations to traverse across the world, whilst philosophies and power flow, constructing human history. Thus, the Silk Road should not exist as a romanticised memory, but as a living framework for modern humans in the comprehension of the complex interconnections in the world of the past, the present and future.

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# A Lesser Known Route of Commerce

*ESF Sha Tin College, Lu, Aiden – 15*

For millennia, the silk road has been renowned as the most influential trade route from antiquity to the medieval era. The footsteps and hooves of its iconic caravans with their long lines of camels stretching across deserts, between a multitude of worlds, have served as almost the symbol of global trade in the historic era. However, the silk road was not merely a single supposed road that stretched from Chang'an to Constantinople. Rather, it was a network of routes, all intertwined with each other, that connected China with many other corners of the world, stretching from the Mediterranean's western ends at Gibraltar, all the way to the Polynesian islands in the middle of the Pacific.

An often overlooked but fundamental portion of this network would be the maritime silk road, rivalling and possibly even eclipsing the desert routes in prosperity, economic development, and reach. Today, the megaports of Shanghai, Zhoushan, Guangzhou, Hong Kong, Singapore, Mumbai, and Dubai, as well as the waterways of the strait of Malacca, Suez canal, and strait of Hormuz, are some of the busiest and most congested trade routes in the entire world. Although much larger in scale and quantity of goods, they are merely a glimpse into the fascinating intrigues of the historic maritime silk road. Imagine a vast stretch of gigantic wooden boats, all shining with their red sails, dominating an entire portion of the sea, almost as if 'the multitudinous seas incarnadine'. That was the effect that astonished onlookers both in the shores of the past and the museums of today would have felt. This is not some sort of grand fantasy about some science-fictional future, but was instead the exact scene of the massive Ming treasure voyages undertaken by admiral Zheng He in the 15th century. This was the pinnacle of the maritime silk road, with the voyages reaching the edges of the sea and ends of the earth, venturing all the way to the east coast of Africa, and being claimed by some to reach as far as America, though this is subject to debate. Nevertheless, the voyages truly embody and reflect the grand scale and immense frequency of trade throughout the maritime silk road, spanning the late antiquity and the entire medieval eras.

Although the maritime silk road really began to be used at the end of antiquity, approximately during the 5th and 6th centuries, the basis for it was founded much earlier during the start of human migration out of Africa. More than 50 millennia ago, early human ancestors already embarked on maritime journeys across what is today's maritime silk road, reaching distant islands such as Java, Australia, Japan, and more. Widespread exchange of goods first occurred in the bronze age, between the seafaring Austronesians populating the islands of Taiwan, the Indonesian archipelago, as well as the southernmost reaches of the Chinese mainland. In traditional Chinese historiography, the root of Chinese civilization is considered to be on the banks of the yellow river, in the northern parts of the country. It would not be until the Qin dynasty, almost 2 millennia after the establishment of the civilization, that it would be expanded to encompass the distant lands of Guangdong and Fujian, which were the heart to the maritime silk road. However, seafaring in the regions already began with the indigenous Baiyue or hundred Viet tribes of the region, who would exchange goods with the various other maritime cultures across Southeast Asia throughout the final 2 millennia before Christ. For most of the Qin and Han dynasties, the land of Guangdong and Fujian remained a barren and desolate jungle, but this would change under the succeeding Jin dynasty, due to the disaster of Yongjia forcing the Jin court to flee to Southern China. This saw one of China's first great migrations southward, and an immediate side effect was the rapid development of the southern regions, especially the port cities such as Guangzhou. In fact, the year 328 saw the establishment of the famed Buddhist Lingyin temple in the city of Hangzhou, which remains one of the most 'holy' sites in China, and this proves the extent of commercial, cultural, and religious interaction in the maritime silk road by that era. The following Tang dynasty saw a unified China with an absence of warfare for a large portion of the High Tang era, and is widely considered the peak of ancient China's prosperity. This also allowed for even greater development along the maritime silk road, though following dynasties and eras would witness even greater achievements.

If there was a city that could embody the entire maritime silk road of China, then the Fujianese port of Quanzhou would undoubtedly be the one that does so to the greatest extent. Originally a fishing village similar to pre-colonial Hong Kong, Quanzhou would rise rapidly during the five dynasties and ten kingdoms period that would follow the collapse of the Tang dynasty, in the 10th century. Although the century witnessed widespread chaos, suffering, and warfare throughout northern China, the resulting great migrations southward also allowed for further development of southern China, with the Qingyuan circuit that ruled over Southern Fujian (where Quanzhou was located) being one of those that prospered. This meant that by the time the Song dynasty had reunited China, Quanzhou's significance grew to eclipse rival megaports such as Guangzhou, and even the iconic land routes of the silk road that had prospered most under the Tang. Moreover, Quanzhou's significance can also be demonstrated by how at the pinnacle of its prosperity, the Song dynasty accounted for more than 60% of the world's total gross domestic product, and even after its territorial losses that led to the Southern Song dynasty, it still retained 50% of the world's gross domestic product. Given that Quanzhou was one of the leading generators of revenue, this really emphasizes the sheer important role that not only the port, but the maritime silk road as a whole, played for the Southern Song economy. In Quanzhou, there still remains physical and material proof and heritage of its once prosperity, where a multitude of cultures met due to the bustling trade of the port city. Quanzhou's Kaiyuan temple is one of the most notable temples across all of China, as well as being Fujian's largest. Although it was built during the Tang dynasty, prior to the widespread use of the port as part of the maritime silk road, its rare Hindu monuments from Southern India are a direct product of the maritime silk road. Moreover, another site with even more diverse backgrounds is the holy site known locally as the Qingjin historic temple, but its actual name is the Al-Sahab grand mosque. As its name suggests, it endorses a religion that, at the time, was quite distant and unfamiliar to the people of not only Fujian, but most of China, reflecting the sheer extent of trade and diversity that existed in Quanzhou.

The following Ming dynasty, particularly the reign of the Yongle emperor, can be considered the pinnacle of the significance, prosperity, and utilization of the maritime silk road. Compared to their predecessors, the Ming were much more strict in the control of trade, with the first sea bans implemented by its founding emperor Hongwu as a result of widespread Japanese pirate raids on the Chinese coast. Nevertheless, his despotism and repression would be defeated by the tracks of human development, and his son emperor Yongle would commission some of the most ambitious and grand voyages that the world has ever seen. A total of seven voyages would be launched, led by admiral Zheng He, one of the most significant diplomats of early-modern China, as well as a brilliant navigator. The voyages were successful in reintroducing Chinese culture, civilization, and commerce to the archipelagos of Southeast Asia, the jungles of the horn of Africa, and Zheng He's own ancestral home in the middle east. Some sources even claim that Zheng He's voyages had reached as far as the Americas, Australia, and Antarctica; inspired the Renaissance that changed Europe; and had created the maps that Columbus and Magellan were using on their own voyages. Although these claims do not have sufficient evidence to be solidified, what is certainly true is the huge impact that the voyages generated. The result was one of the first times that the Ming emperor and his officials were able to witness gifts of 'mythical-like' giraffes that ambassadors from those distant lands had brought with them. The ambassadors were received at a state ceremony attended by 26000, with the return of the fleet bringing back hundreds of ships filled with almost 20000 people. All these were especially impressive at the time, as in comparison, at the same time, king Henry V's marriage to Catherine of Valois was marked with a ceremony consisting of 600 guests, served with stockfish on stale bread acting as plates. Moreover, Henry V was only able to use 4 fishing boats to ferry his soldiers across the English channel, in his famous campaign against France in the Hundred Years' War, and also bear in mind that Henry V was one of Shakespeare's MVPs. Nevertheless, the eventual end of the maritime silk road would mean that it would be Henry V, instead of Zheng He, whose tale would be almost deified in subsequent centuries, across the world, even in today's textbooks and examinations.

The land routes of the silk road had declined following the collapse of the Mongol empire, which maintained the route's long stretch under a single flag; the rise of the Ottoman empire, which was hostile to the non-Muslim entities of Europe and China; and finally, the increasing use of sea routes as a means of trade between Europe and

China during the Ming dynasty. Although it would seem like the maritime silk road would become ever increasingly significant and persist to this day, that would not be the case, and it would also fall victim to warfare, piracy, and hostility between governments. The fall of the Ming dynasty meant that the Manchus to the north of the great wall were able to cross into China, and take over the entire nation. Surviving Ming loyalists under the famed pirate king Koxinga would escape to the then Dutch-controlled island of Taiwan, and establish their own state on the island, which they would use as a base to launch raids against the Qing. As a means of starving out the last bastion of resistance against him, Qing emperor Kangxi would usher in the sea bans, completely cutting off all maritime trade. This, and his policy of great clearance, whereby all residents of China's coastline were forced to move inland, effectively brought an end to the maritime silk road's function, with the great ports of Quanzhou and Guangzhou reduced to piles of rubble. It is worth noting that similar policies were also carried out by other East Asian governments, such as the Tokugawa Shogunate. The Qing would eventually restore tiny amounts of trade to the port of Guangzhou, and this unwillingness to trade would be the final straw for the collapse of the entire maritime silk road system. Ironically, although Kangxi's policies earned him control of Taiwan, it would cost his descendants China's prosperity, falling victim to colonialism in the 19th century after two centuries of isolation and non-development.

Today, in similar manner to the historic silk road, the maritime silk road has also been revived as both sites for tourists to admire, as well as practical trade routes in operation today. There are a plethora of historic sites in China that can be visited, as heritage of this vast historic network. Trade also continues to flourish along the once bustling sea routes, especially with the launch of China's Belt and Road initiative, bringing to restoration this once great web of commerce and cultural exchange.

# 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, Frchetti 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 unbound 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 cooperation 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.

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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.

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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.

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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 occupance 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.

# The Eternal Silk Road: Trade, Culture, and Connection Across Millennia

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In a vast expanse of land, a road stretching for thousands of miles opened a pathway for communication and exchange between the East and the West. The Silk Road, this legendary route that connected distant sides of the world, continues to shine brightly in our history. It tells the fascinating story of our ancestors who ventured along this path in pursuit of a better future, not only for themselves but for generations to come, including each one of us today.

Even nowadays, certain segments of the Silk Road remain in active use, such as the paved highway that links Pakistan with Xinjiang in China. Yet beyond its physical remnants, it endures as a powerful symbol of the deep connections between China and various Western countries. Its enduring legacy has profoundly influenced art, literature, and culture, as the goods exchanged along these routes showcased and stimulated the remarkable creativity of people in China and beyond. For instance, exquisite Buddhist art flourished, and fine porcelain emerged as a hallmark of craftsmanship during this era. Additionally, silk established itself as a highly coveted fabric among royalty because of its exceptional lightness and superior quality compared to other materials, enabling the elite in ancient China to enjoy unparalleled luxury. In exchange, silk was traded westward for other precious commodities from Western countries, including rare spices and tea.

The ancient Chinese possessed a profound artistic spirit, which enabled them to create such outstanding works of art. Silk itself stood as one of the major commodities transported along the Silk Road. This network remained actively used for over 1,500 years, spanning roughly from around 130 BCE to the mid-15th century CE. Throughout this long period, the Silk Road played a crucial role in driving China's economic expansion, cultural enrichment, and political development.

Indeed, numerous technological advancements were exchanged along the Silk Road, including the techniques of papermaking and advanced textile production. Papermaking, which originated in China, gradually spread to the Islamic civilization and later to Europe. Merchants traveling these routes carried paper to document trade transactions, contracts, and personal letters efficiently. They also transmitted papermaking knowledge across diverse regions, representing a monumental contribution to the advancement of human civilization, the dissemination of knowledge, and the propagation of religions. The widespread adoption of paper greatly facilitated many aspects of daily life, especially in recording scriptures, preserving historical accounts, and enabling broader literacy.

Merchants and travellers shared news, stories, and valuable knowledge through verbal exchanges, which helped build lasting relationships and mutual trust among participants. Along the Silk Road, where groups often spoke different languages, travellers and merchants relied on nonverbal communication to interact effectively. They appeared to develop improvised systems of understanding that bridged linguistic divides. Through these diverse forms of communication, cultures became interconnected, influencing the evolution of languages in both ancient times and the modern era. This rich history underscores the remarkable communication skills that people cultivated across vast distances.

Moreover, silk served as a vital medium for forging connections between East and West, sustaining long-term relationships among various cultures. During the Han dynasty, Chinese artisans frequently produced porcelain items to exchange with regions such as the Arabian Peninsula and the Indian subcontinent. This porcelain gradually became a prestigious status symbol in Arabian societies, prompting widespread demand. Later, a distinctive new style of blue-and-white porcelain emerged, following the earlier tradition of celadon ware. Through ongoing cultural and economic exchanges, porcelain exerted significant influence on other countries. It remained one of the major commodities in East-West trade.

Furthermore, the Silk Road enabled different countries to discover and adopt 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 travelled widely via the Silk Road, transforming

culinary practices from East to West and earning parts of the network the alternative name "spice route." These spices represented highly valuable goods; they enhanced the flavour of food dramatically and elevated its overall appeal and worth. This exchange spurred improvements in food production, as well as advancements in agricultural knowledge and practices across different regions. In the realm of art, artists acquired new techniques, styles, and elements from one another through interactions across regions, encompassing painting, textiles, statues, and pottery. These artistic influences spread along the Silk Road, often channelled through Central Asia.

Along the route, Buddhist monks constructed remarkable combinations of caves and temples, frequently situated 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 following deliberate demolition efforts, they once stood as extraordinary testaments to the route's cultural significance. Many people assume the Silk Road primarily served to export Chinese silk to Western countries, but in reality, a great variety 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 world. The Silk Road contributed to regional development by fostering economic growth, increasing wealth, and promoting the rise of prosperous city-states through enhanced commerce. For example, the introduction of horses to China bolstered military capabilities and later contributed to the might of the Mongol Empire, whose leaders recognized the value of horses as essential transport after observing their use in China. The Silk Road also established a vast network connecting people from East to West globally. Knowledge in fields such as science, astronomy, mathematics, and medicine spread along these paths. Buddhism travelled from India to China, profoundly influencing Chinese art and literature. Overall, the Silk Road played a major role in disseminating religious ideas by enabling extensive interaction among diverse cultures. It shaped the development of civilizations across continents. The movements of people led to significant 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 that reflect distinctive cultural heritages—this exemplifies 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.

Zhang Qian's initial mission lasted approximately 13 years, during which he endured significant dangers, including capture and prolonged detention by the Xiongnu, who posed constant threats to his safety and progress. Upon finally returning to the Han capital of Chang'an, although he had failed to secure the desired military alliance with the Yuezhi, he brought back a wealth of valuable information. His reports greatly expanded Chinese knowledge and understanding of the distant lands, peoples, cultures, and geography to the west.

Seven years later, Zhang Qian was sent on a second major expedition through Central Asia. During this journey, he deepened his familiarity with the diverse cultures, territories, and products of various western civilizations. Among his notable discoveries were new crops previously unknown in China, including grapes and alfalfa, which would later enrich Han agriculture and economy. Over the course of about 20 years encompassing his travels and their aftermath, Zhang Qian effectively pioneered and explored the routes that formed the foundation of the Silk Road. He traversed and identified several key trade pathways that connected East and West.

Zhang Qian's accounts of his travels were recorded and preserved, notably in the "Records of the Grand Historian" compiled by Sima Qian. These detailed reports inspired later explorers, including figures like Christopher Columbus, who drew motivation from descriptions of distant lands to pursue further exploration. The Silk Road enabled many regions to learn about technologies, creativity, and innovations among people in Europe, Asia, and beyond. It encouraged the pursuit of new knowledge, promoting development across various fields and fostering the blending of diverse cultures. For example, people in China now enjoy songs from foreign

countries and savor Italian cuisine, illustrating how different nations possess their own unique beauty. We must respect other cultures despite our own habits and traditions. In essence, the Silk Road laid the groundwork for modern globalization, even for ancient peoples.

The Silk Road was gradually expanded and solidified through these pioneering missions that bridged the East and the West. Once reliable trade routes came into existence, numerous merchants began actively exchanging a wide variety of goods across regions. From China, items such as fine textiles, spices, and tea flowed westward, while in return, the West introduced fruits like peaches and citrus varieties to the East. Along these perilous routes, merchants frequently faced the risk of having their valuable cargoes stolen by robbers, as many traded items were highly expensive and desirable.

As a result of this burgeoning trade, China grew increasingly wealthy and gained widespread recognition and prestige among other nations. This prosperity stemmed largely from China's exceptional innovations in textile production and its development of remarkable culinary traditions and foodstuffs. Furthermore, the Silk Road attracted numerous famous explorers in later centuries, one of the most renowned being Marco Polo. This Venetian traveler spent around 24 years journeying along the trade routes to reach China, documenting his extraordinary experiences and further highlighting the enduring significance of these ancient pathways.

People in ancient times created such an extraordinary trade route, allowing us to discover and appreciate other cultures. It facilitated the development of our global trading systems and enriched our collective knowledge. We can draw valuable lessons from the explorers of the Silk Road, including the importance of mutual respect among nations. Ancient peoples invented and shared countless innovations, and by studying them, we gain deeper understanding. With remarkable intelligence, they explored the Silk Road and exchanged goods that continue to enrich our lives in areas such as food, medicine, and art. We can ignite our own creativity by drawing inspiration from their achievements. We should emulate Zhang Qian's persistent spirit in overcoming challenges. This ancient trade route continues to guide us toward a more unified and understanding future. We ought to appreciate the diversity of cultures in our world today. The Silk Road was never solely about silk or other goods; it represents profound human connections and the beautiful blending of cultures across countries. This cultural blending showcased the elegance of collaboration among nations. In the same way, we can become innovators today, creating something useful and meaningful for future generations as well.

The Silk Road was far more than a mere trade route—it represented a vibrant network of paths that linked East and West for over 1,500 years, from around 130 BCE to the mid-15th century CE. Although only fragments remain today, such as the modern paved highway connecting Pakistan and Xinjiang in China, it persists as a symbol of the enduring ties between China and the Western world. This ancient network profoundly shaped art, literature, economies, and cultures through the dynamic exchange of goods, ideas, technologies, and religions.

Silk stood as the most iconic commodity, a luxurious fabric treasured for its lightweight comfort, sheen, and elegance. In ancient China, it was reserved exclusively for royalty and nobility, while in the West, it was eagerly traded for valuable items like spices, precious metals, and other luxuries. Chinese artisans displayed extraordinary creativity, producing exquisite Buddhist art and fine porcelain that journeyed along these routes. Porcelain, particularly the blue-and-white varieties that developed later under influences from the Middle East, became a coveted status symbol in regions like the Arabian Peninsula and India, strengthening cultural and economic bonds.

Technological advancements flowed freely in both directions. Papermaking, invented in China, spread to the Islamic world and eventually Europe, revolutionizing record-keeping, contracts, and communication for merchants. Travelers exchanged knowledge verbally, built trust through shared stories and news, and even devised nonverbal methods to overcome language barriers—laying early foundations for cross-cultural understanding that resonate in our globalized world today.

The Silk Road also transformed cuisine profoundly. Spices such as pepper journeyed from India and other areas, leading some sections of the network to be called the "spice routes." New crops—including citrus fruits, grapes, and alfalfa—moved between China, Central Asia, and the West, enriching diets and advancing agricultural practices everywhere. Cooking methods and recipes intermingled, enhancing flavors and sparking innovations that endure in contemporary kitchens.

In art and architecture, influences merged in captivating ways. Techniques in painting, textiles, sculpture, and pottery crossed regions, frequently via Central Asia. Buddhist monks crafted stunning cave temples and statues near key stops, such as the colossal Buddhas of Bamiyan in Afghanistan—ancient marvels tragically destroyed by the Taliban in 2001 after weeks of deliberate demolition.

Although silk often receives the spotlight, exchanges were truly bidirectional: goods from Rome, India, the Arab Caliphate, and later Russia moved eastward, including horses that bolstered Chinese military strength and later empowered the Mongol Empire. The route spurred economic growth, the emergence of affluent cities, and the foundation of global trading systems.

Key figures opened and popularized these paths. Zhang Qian, a Han Dynasty envoy dispatched in 138 BCE to forge alliances against the Xiongnu, spent over a decade in Central Asia. Though his diplomatic efforts fell short, he returned with invaluable insights into Western lands, cultures, and products—establishing the groundwork for the Silk Road's expansion. Centuries later, Marco Polo travelled for 24 years, chronicling his experiences in a renowned book that inspired European explorers like Christopher Columbus and ignited greater curiosity about the East.

As the Silk Road enabled the exchange of goods, it also served as a vital conduit for ideas. Philosophies, cultures, and religions traversed this network, promoting mutual understanding and collaboration. The journey transcended commerce; it built bridges among diverse civilizations, each contributing to the rich tapestry of human history. The Silk Road reminds us of our shared heritage and urges us to embrace the diversity that defines our modern world.

In today's interconnected global landscape, the spirit of the Silk Road lives on through countless initiatives aimed at enhancing connectivity and collaboration among nations. As we strive to nurture an environment that values dialogue and equitable trade, we can reflect on the timeless lessons of the Silk Road, recognizing the profound importance of unity amid diversity. Its story extends far beyond history; it continues to inspire us to pursue new pathways for cooperation and mutual understanding in our ever-evolving world.

# A Catalyst for Cultural, Economic, and Political Exchange

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## Introduction

Modern trade routes, like the Strait of Malacca, the Suez Canal, and the North–South Transport Corridor, were established thanks to the ancient and foundational pathway of exchange. Let it be culture, beverages, riding horses, or gold; the remarkable Silk Road of China started an age where the East and the West could trade freely regardless of distance. This was the time when Chinese silk stood in the limelight, bringing economic and cultural prosperity to China and other countries, bonding over the collective benefits of trade.

Before the 2nd century BCE, long–distance trade and cultural exchanges were not only limited but also localised. Civilisations such as Mesopotamia, Ancient Egypt, and the Indus Valley primarily engaged in regional trade. Therefore, goods were only limited to metals, pottery, and agricultural products that were within neighbouring regions. Trade routes were also often fragmented and not extensive, hindered by geographical barriers like deserts and mountains. Even though caravans and river transport were used for moving goods, the lack of a continuous, organised network limited the efficiency of long–distance commerce.

Nevertheless, after the establishment of the Silk Road, distant regions across Asia, the Middle East, and Europe became connected. Unlike the fragmented and localised trade system before the 2nd century BCE, the Silk Road enabled the movement of a wide variety of goods over long distances. It was also able to overcome geographical barriers by creating well–established caravan routes and facilitating safer passage through key trading hubs. The Silk Road not only enabled efficient long–distance commerce but also promoted cultural exchanges, technological diffusion, and diplomatic relations among diverse civilisations.

The Silk Road’s modern impacts are profound, as it laid the foundation for global trade and cultural exchange that continues today. It fostered early connections between Asia, Europe, and Africa, facilitating the spread of goods, ideas, and technologies. This essay aims to discuss the history and numerous significant impacts of the Silk Road.

## Precursors

The precursors of the Silk Road played an important role in its development, as it laid the foundation of diplomatic relationships and key trade routes between countries. Before the establishment of the Silk Road, China was already engaging in trade actively with nomadic groups along the frontiers, exchanging goods such as silk, ceramics, and metalwork for horses, furs, and other valuable resources from nomadic tribes like the Xiongnu. These relationships have manifested themselves in the art of Chinese jade carvers, where the carvers adopted the Scythian–style animal art depicting animals locked in combat when designing the rectangular belt plaques used to distinguish warrior statuses. The expansion of Scythian cultures, which stretched from the Hungarian plain and the Carpathian Mountains to the Chinese Gansu Corridor, undoubtedly played an imperative role in the development of the Silk Road by forming relationships between different regions.

Additionally, the preceding contact between the East and the West long before the 2nd century BCE set the stage for the establishment of trade routes. According to a genetic study of the Tarim mummies found in the Tarim Basin, many of the Tarim mummies show genetic markers associated with ancient populations from the Eurasian Steppe and Europe, such as the Yamnaya or Afanasievo cultures, suggesting early migration or gene flow from Western Eurasia into the Tarim Basin. This demonstrates early contact between the East and the West

dating back to about 1600 BCE, indicating that relationships between countries were formed in very ancient times. Consequently, it laid the foundation for the diplomatic relationships required for the trade routes' inauguration.

Moreover, the expansion of empires also contributed greatly to the trade network. For instance, the Persian Empire, which lasted from 550 to 330 BCE, was known for building an extensive network of roads like the Royal Road, enabling trade for relatively long distances. These roads connected major cities like Sardis and Susa, facilitating movement for traders and diplomats and laying the foundation for trade routes. In addition, the Roman Empire's demand for luxury goods also became a great motivation for the development of the Silk Road, prompting countries to establish trade networks to enhance their prosperity. The spread of these empires therefore set the stage for the Silk Road.

### **Initiation of the Silk Road**

The Silk Road's initiation and spread by China's Han dynasty was done through exploration and conquests in Central Asia. Since the Mediterranean was linked to the Fergana Valley, the next step was to open a route across the Tarim Basin and the Hexi Corridor to China Proper. The extension was initiated around 138–130 BCE, with the embassies of the Han dynasty to Central Asia following the reports of the ambassador Zhang Qian, who was originally sent to obtain an alliance with the Yuezhi against the Xiongnu. The ambassador visited and reported on numerous places like the kingdom of Dayuan in Ferghana, the Bactrian country of Daxia, and the territories of the Yuezhi in Transoxiana. These reports suggested China would benefit much in its economic development through its westward expansion, becoming one of the incentives to initiate the Silk Road.

There were also multiple other motivations for the initiation of the Silk Road. For instance, some experts believe that the Chinese Emperor Wu became interested in developing commercial relationships with sophisticated civilisations like the Ferghana and Bactria, in which the Silk Road's inauguration could be able to facilitate trade between China and these civilisations. Additionally, during Emperor Wu's rule, he had the major incentive of fighting the Xiongnu, so he was also strongly attracted to the powerful "heavenly horses" that Dayuan possessed, which could play an important role in winning battles. This also prompted China to expand their trade routes.

Regarding the facilitation of trade, trade along the Silk Road was primarily conducted via caravans. These caravans were groups of merchants, traders, and their animals who travelled the Silk Routes to carry goods to other parties. These caravans typically consisted of camels, horses, and donkeys, ranging from a dozen to several hundred. The caravans required merchants and travellers to make stops at various towns and cities for supplies, rest, and trade. As a result, caravan stops often developed into prosperous and influential urban centres like Palmyra, which became a vital transit hub for collecting incense from Arabia and silk from China for the Roman Empire. Similarly, cities like Samarkand and Bukhara in Central Asia flourished as key commercial and cultural centres, benefiting from the constant flow of merchants and goods.

Additionally, the use of common languages contributed greatly to the facilitation of trade. For instance, the usage of Sogdian enabled merchants from different regions to form connections; examples include parts of modern-day Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan and China. The usage of a common language also led to the formation of widespread merchant communities, referred to as the Sogdian Diaspora, which formed diasporic communities in oasis cities and parts of China, creating vast commercial and cultural networks.

Moreover, the Silk Road was renowned for the diverse range of goods that were traded along its extensive networks of routes, connecting East Asia with the Mediterranean. The most famous commodity, given in the name of the trade route, was silk. Silk was highly prized in Europe for its quality and rarity, with the Roman Empire purchasing a profuse amount to the point where the emperor banned citizens from any further usage. In addition to silk, traders exchanged spices such as cinnamon and pepper, which were valuable for culinary and medicinal purposes. Precious metals and stones, including gold, silver, jade, and pearls, also moved along the route, alongside textiles like wool and cotton. Other important goods included ceramics, glassware, paper, and horses, which were essential for transportation and military use. This rich variety of traded items greatly fuelled economic prosperity between civilisations.

The routes of the Silk Road were relatively complex. The Silk Road was split into two primary routes, the northern route and the southern route. The Northern Route was defined around the 1st century BCE when Han Wudi put an end to harassment by nomadic tribes through winning the War of the Heavenly Horses and the Han–Xiongnu War. The route started at Chang’an, which was an ancient capital of China that was moved east during the Later Han. The route travelled northwest through the Chinese province of Gansu from Shaanxi Province and split into further routes, with two of them following the mountain ranges to the north and south of the Taklamakan Desert to rejoin at Kashgar, and the other going north of the Tian Shan mountains through Turpan, Talgar, and Almaty. Moreover, goods traded on the Northern Route included silk, horses, jade, spices and precious metals.

On the other hand, the Southern Route was mainly a single route that started from China that stretches through the Karakoram mountains, passing northern Pakistan, and into Afghanistan, where it rejoins the Northern Route near Merv, Turkmenistan. Also, goods that were traded on the Northern Route mainly consisted of incense, ivory, gold and exotic animals. Excavations in regions such as the Indian subcontinent, Sri Lanka, and Southeast Asia have revealed artefacts like Roman coins, Chinese silk fragments, and Indian spices, indicating active trade connections.

Furthermore, there was also a Maritime Silk Route that was opened up between Chinese–controlled Giao Chi aside from the two primary land routes. The Maritime Silk Route connected Southeast Asia, East Asia, the Indian subcontinent, the Arabian Peninsula, eastern Africa, and Europe. It was primarily established and operated by Austronesian sailors who sailed lashed–lug ships that facilitated overseas trade. Evidence of overseas trade was shown when a 2000–year–old Roman glassware bowl found in China was unearthed from a Western Han tomb in Guangzhou, showing that Roman commercial items were being imported through the South China Sea.

### **Economic impacts**

The need for robust trade practices led to the development of early financial systems along the Silk Road, laying the foundation for the later economy. As trade volumes increased, merchants figured out new ways to facilitate transactions and manage risks associated with long–distance trade. This led to the prominence of promissory notes and letters of credit, which allowed merchants to conduct transactions without the physical exchange of currency. This is shown through the usage of a system called “flying cash” (feiqian) by Chinese merchants and government, allowing them to deposit money in one location and withdraw it in another, reducing the need to carry large amounts of cash across long distances. These innovative financial systems served as inspiration for modern banking practices, including bills of exchange, cheques, and credit systems.

Market development along the Silk Road was pivotal in transforming urban regions into bustling hubs of trade. Cities such as Samarkand and Kashgar emerged as key trading posts by the 8th century and were strategically located at the crossroads of East–West trade. Archaeological evidence, including the remains of caravanserais and marketplaces, reveals that these cities supported spontaneous commercial activity where traders from regions frequently traded multitudinous goods. Historical accounts describe vibrant markets in cities like Baghdad, where a diverse array of products were sold, enabling great market development and economic networks across regions. The gathering of traders from different regions also contributed to the development of specialised crafts and industries, further stimulating local economies.

Another key economic impact that the Silk Road had was creating great economic power shifts, which occurred as a result of increased trade and the rise of influential merchant classes. The expansion of the Mongol Empire was a key example of this transformation, where Genghis Khan and his successors established a vast network of trade routes and connected Asia and Europe by extending the Silk Road. This environment allowed merchants like the reputable trader Marco Polo to trade across multiple regions, enabling traders to skyrocket in wealth. Historical records also show that cities like Samarkand and Cairo with prosperous merchant guilds thrived significantly. Ibn Battuta, the 14th-century traveller, noted the significant influence and wealth of traders in metropolitan areas. This illustrates how trade with the Silk Route enriched individual merchants and shifted economic power away from traditional landowning aristocracies toward newly prosperous trading classes.

### **Cultural impacts**

One of the most significant cultural impacts of the Silk Road was the exchange of ideas and philosophies that enabled the development of new religions. The movement of merchants, travellers, and scholars along the routes facilitated the dissemination of diverse worldviews. For example, the spread of Buddhism from India to Central Asia and further into China exemplifies the transformational role of the Silk Road in religious and philosophical thought. Also, as Buddhist monks travelled along the Silk Road, they carried teachings and sacred texts with them, establishing monastic communities and new cultures across the Silk Routes. This enabled Buddhism to synchronise with local cultures, forming religions like Chinese Buddhism, merging Taoism and Buddhist thought.

Additionally, the Silk Road served as a vital conduit for the exchange of scientific knowledge, facilitating the spread of ideas and innovations across vast and diverse cultures. One of the most significant was the introduction of Indian numerals to the Islamic world via the Silk Road, which revolutionised mathematics by simplifying calculations, which enabled more problem-solving techniques. Beyond mathematics, the Silk Road also was crucial in transmitting medical knowledge. Important medical texts, such as those authored by Hippocrates and Galen, were translated and shared amongst scholars from different regions. This led to the exchange of enriched medical practices by combining various healing traditions and techniques, leading to significant advancements in medicine and surgery.

Cultural interactions along the Silk Road significantly influenced artistic expression. The movement of goods was accompanied by the exchange of artistic techniques and styles. For instance, the introduction of Chinese silk to Persia not only enhanced textile artistry but also inspired Persian motifs and designs, such as floral patterns, dragons, and cloud designs. Moreover, the art of painting and sculpture evolved significantly due to these exchanges. In Central Asia, the Greco–Buddhist art observed in the caves of Bamiyan manifests the fusion of Hellenistic and Buddhist iconography, illustrating how the artistic traditions blended. This fusion is evident in the use of realistic human figures and intricate details reminiscent of Hellenistic art, which was combined with the spiritual themes of Buddhism.

## **Political impacts**

One of the most prominent political impacts of the Silk Road was the establishment of diplomatic relationships among various kingdoms and empires. As merchants traversed the trade routes, they acted as informal ambassadors, fostering connections between different political entities. For instance, the Mongol Empire in the 13th century utilised the Silk Road to consolidate power through diplomatic relations. Kublai Khan, a grandson of the renowned leader Genghis Khan, through sending envoys to different places such as the court of Pope Innocent IV via the Silk Road, focused heavily on fostering connections and alliances with European states. This therefore proves the importance of the Silk Road as an essential part in forming diplomatic relationships and alliances.

Additionally, the Silk Road significantly shaped the rise and fall of empires. The vast wealth generated through trade allowed empires to expand their territories, finance armies, and gain political stability. For example, the wealth obtained from the Silk Road allowed the Tang Dynasty to flourish culturally and politically. The prosperity contributed to the creation of a centralised bureaucracy, enabling the state to maintain control over vast territories and diverse populations. Similarly, the wealth of the Byzantine Empire enabled it to project military power and influence in the Mediterranean. However, this dependence on trade also led to the fall of empires. The decline of the Silk Road due to factors such as the rise of maritime trade routes and political fragmentation in the region contributed to the weakening of several empires, with the Mongol Empire being the most notable example.

Furthermore, despite facilitating the formation of diplomatic relationships, the Silk Road incited competition and conflict amongst various political entities. As stated in the previous paragraph, due to empires' dependence on the Silk Road, conflict arose because of their desire to maintain control over powerful trade routes, leading to territorial disputes and military confrontations. For instance, the Roman and Parthian Empires were in constant competition for control over trade in the region, culminating in a series of wars across centuries. This rivalry had profound political implications, as both empires sought to expand their influence in the East, impacting their domestic and foreign policies. Similarly, the Byzantine Empire and Islamic caliphates struggled for the control of Silk Road trade routes because European powers sought to exert influence over lucrative regions of the Middle East. As a result, competition for trade ultimately led to conflicts during the Crusades, leading to the demise of thousands.

## **Conclusion**

It is irrefutable that the Silk Road had profound economic, cultural and political impacts on empires. This essay proved that the Silk Road was not only just a simple trade route that enabled countries to exchange goods with each other, but it was also a facilitator of diplomatic relations, the determinant of the rise and fall of empires, and a paintbrush that illustrated the diverse and colourful cultures and innovations brought together.

To this day, the Silk Road's legacy continues to have significant modern impacts, shaping global trade, cultural exchange, and international relations. The concept of the Silk Road inspires initiatives like China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which aims to revive and expand trade routes connecting Asia, Europe, and Africa through infrastructure development and economic cooperation. With the establishment of the Silk Road, we have laid the groundwork for the interconnectedness of the contemporary world, with its inspiration continuing to shape global society.

# The Pioneer of the Silk Road: Zhang Qian's Epic Journeys and Legacy

*Pui Kiu College, Chung, Eunis – 15*

The Silk Road is a network of trade routes that connected the East and the West, facilitating the exchange of goods, ideas, cultures, and technologies, and stands as one of the most significant developments in human history. Expanding from China through Central Asia to the Mediterranean, it enabled the flow of silk, spices, precious metals, and knowledge across continents. While the Silk Road evolved over centuries, its origins can be traced back to the bold explorations of a single individual during the Han Dynasty, Zhang Qian. He is often hailed as the "father of the Silk Road," Zhang Qian was a Chinese diplomat, explorer, and a representative whose missions in the 2nd century BC opened the door to the Western Regions, or Xiyu, for the Chinese empire. His travels not only provided the first reliable accounts of distant lands but also laid the groundwork for enduring trade relations that shaped global history.

Zhang Qian was born around 195 BC in Chenggu district, which is the east of Hanzhong in what is now Shaanxi province, China. Zhang Qian entered the historical record as a modest court official. Not a lot of people know about his early life, but by the time he reached adulthood, he had joined the imperial court in Chang'an which is modern-day Xi'an as a Gentleman, a low-ranking position in the bureaucracy of the Western Han Dynasty. This era, under Emperor Wu who reigned 141 to 187 BC, was marked by ambitious expansionism and a desperate need to counter external threats. Zhang's story is inseparately linked to the geopolitical tensions of his time, particularly the ongoing conflicts with the nomadic Xiongnu tribes, who dominated the steppes of Inner Mongolia and blocked China's access to the west. His journeys, which are documented in the Records of the Grand Historian by the historian Sima Qian around 94 BC, revealing a man of resilience and curiosity whose efforts transcended military objectives to foster unmatched cultural and economic connections.

To understand Zhang Qian's significance, one must first grasp the historical context of the Han Dynasty, which was founded in 206 BC after the collapse of the Qin Dynasty, the Han era represented a golden age of Chinese civilization, with advancements in agriculture, technology, and governance. However, the dynasty faced constant harassment from the Xiongnu, an alliance of nomadic warriors skilled in horseback archery. These nomads raided Han borders, disrupting trade and agriculture, and their control over the Gobi Desert and surrounding areas isolated China from potential allies and markets in Central Asia. Emperor Wu, who is an aggressive ruler determined to expand Han influence wanted to break this isolation. He aimed to form alliances with distant tribes like the Yuezhi, who had been displaced by the Xiongnu and resettled in regions west of China. The Yuezhi, speaking an Indo-European language, were seen as potential partners in a pincer attack against the Xiongnu. Additionally, the Han court coveted superior cavalry horses from the west to bolster their military, as Chinese breeds were inferior for prolonged warfare.

It was in this volatile environment that Zhang Qian was selected for his fateful first mission in 138 BC. At the time, he was a relatively obscure official, but his loyalty and perhaps his prior knowledge of the Xiongnu gleaned from captured informants which made him a suitable candidate. Emperor Wu dispatched him with a party of about 100 men, including a Xiongnu guide named Ganfu, who had been captured earlier. It was loaded with gifts such as silk, gold, and cattle to bribe potential allies, the expedition's main goal was to reach the Yuezhi in what is now Tajikistan and persuade them to join forces against their common enemy. The journey was risky from the start, as the group had to cross Xiongnu-controlled territory north of the Gobi Desert.

However, misfortune struck. The party was captured by Xiongnu forces, and Zhang Qian was brought before their leader, the Shanyu who was the chieftain that were imprisoned for over a decade. Zhang was treated as a slave but gradually earned the trust of his captors. He was even allowed to marry a Xiongnu woman, who gave him a son, and integrated into their nomadic lifestyle. This period of captivity was not wasted. Zhang learned valuable survival skills, languages, and intelligence about the Xiongnu's weaknesses. Around 128 BC, among internal strife following the death of the Shanyu, Zhang seized the opportunity to escape with Ganfu, his wife,

and son. They fled westward, navigating the harsh landscapes of the Tarim Basin in Xinjiang, skirting the southern edges of the Taklamakan Desert, and crossing fortified oases.

After enduring extreme hardships, the thirst, hunger, and hostile terrains, the group reached Dayuan which is the Fergana Valley in modern Uzbekistan, a prosperous kingdom known for its urban centers and agriculture. Here, Zhang encountered a settled society with over 70 fortified cities, populations numbering in the hundreds of thousands, and advanced viticulture, producing wine from grapes. He noted the people's skill in farming rice and wheat, and their possession of legendary "heavenly horses" that "sweated blood". From Dayuan, Zhang proceeded to the Yuezhi, who had migrated to the Amu Darya Oxus River valley in Bactria which is in northern Afghanistan. The Yuezhi, now a nomadic people with 100,000 to 200,000 archer warriors, were uninterested in revenge against the Xiongnu, having found peace in their new homeland. Undeterred, Zhang spent a year among them and in neighboring Daxia Bactria, observing remnants of Greco-Bactrian culture left by Alexander the Great's conquests centuries earlier. He documented urban lifestyles, commerce, and the relative military weakness of these states, which prioritized trade over warfare.

Zhang's reports, later compiled by Sima Qian, offer vivid glimpses into these lands of Dayuan, he wrote "Dayuan lies south-west of the territory of the Xiongnu, some 10,000 li directly west of China. The people are settled on the land, ploughing the fields and growing rice and wheat. They also make wine out of grapes. The people live in houses in fortified cities, there being some seventy or more cities of various sizes in the region. The population numbers several hundred thousand." On the Yuezhi: "The Great Yuezhi live some 2,000 or 3,000 west of Dayuan, north of the Gui Oxus river. They are bordered to the south by Daxia Bactria, on the west by Anxi, and on the north by Kangju. They are a nation of nomads, moving from place to place with their herds and their customs are like those of the Xiongnu. They have around 100,000 to 200,000 archer warriors." And of Daxia: "Daxia is situated over 2,000 south-west of Dayuan Ferghana, south of the Gui Oxus river. Its people cultivate the land, and have cities and houses. Their customs are like those of Dayuan. It has no great ruler but only a number of petty chiefs ruling the various cities. The people are poor in the use of arms and afraid of battle, but they are clever at commerce."

He also gathered second-hand information on farther regions, such as Shendu India, where "the inhabitants ride elephants when they go in battle," and Anxi which is the Parthian Empire, a land of walled cities and grape wine production several thousand li west. These accounts painted a picture of sophisticated civilizations ripe for trade, contrasting with China's isolation.

The return journey was equally difficult. Heading south along the Tarim Basin, Zhang was recaptured by the Xiongnu and imprisoned for another year or two. Finally, exploiting further chaos in the Xiongnu leadership, he escaped and reached Chang'an in 126 BC, around 13 years after his departure. Of his original 100 companions, only Zhang and Ganfu survived. Emperor Wu honored him as a palace counsellor, valuing the intelligence over the failed alliance. Zhang's reports revealed not just military opportunities but economic potential, the western kingdoms admired Chinese silk and were eager to trade.

Emboldened by this knowledge, Emperor Wu commissioned Zhang for a second mission around 119 to 115 BC, initially attempting a southern route to India via Sichuan, but this proved impassable due to rugged terrain and hostile tribes. Instead, the focus shifted to a third mission in the same period, establishing ties with the Wusun people in the Ili River valley which is modern day Kazakhstan. Zhang led a large delegation to the Wusun, who were Indo-European nomads similar to the Yuezhi. While he negotiated, he dispatched assistants to explore further, one to Dayuan, Kangju (Sogdiana in Uzbekistan), and Yancai (steppe nomads) while others to Yuezhi, Anxi (Parthia), Tiaozi (Mesopotamia or Seleucid remnants), and Lijian (possibly Hellenistic states). These sub-missions gathered data on Parthia, India, and even vague hints of the Roman Empire.

Upon returning in 115 BC, Zhang brought back alfalfa seeds for better horse fodder, grapevines for winemaking, and one-humped dromedary camels—novelties that enriched Chinese agriculture and transport. More crucially, his efforts sparked Han military campaigns, such as the War of the Heavenly Horses in 104 to 101 BC, where

forces invaded Dayuan to acquire the prized Ferghana horses, essential for cavalry superiority against the Xiongnu. These horses, stronger and faster, revolutionized Han warfare.

Zhang Qian's discoveries extended beyond the material. He introduced China to a world of diverse cultures, urbanized societies with coinage, writing, and art influenced by Hellenistic traditions, nomadic herders and fertile valleys producing exotic fruits like pomegranates and walnuts. His reports highlighted the commercial acumen of these peoples, noting how Daxia was "clever at commerce" despite military timidity. This intelligence prompted a surge in Han embassies which is up to 10 per year, each with hundreds of members who carry silk westward in exchange for horses, gems, and spices. By 114 BC, the Central Asian sections of the Silk Road were formalized, with routes branching north and south of the Taklamakan Desert, relying on oases for sustenance.

The impact of Zhang's journeys on the Silk Road cannot be overstated. What began as a quest for military alliances evolved into a conduit for globalization. Silk, China's prized export, flowed to Parthia and beyond, reaching Roman markets where it was valued as highly as gold. In return, China received not only horses and plants but also ideas such as when Buddhism later entered via these routes, along with astronomical knowledge and musical instruments. Archaeological evidence, such as Persian artifacts in Han tomb, certify early trade. Reciprocal missions from Parthia around 100 BC further solidified ties. The Silk Road, named retrospectively in the 19th century by German geographer Ferdinand von Richthofen, stretched 4,000 to 5,000 miles, influencing economies from Chang'an to Rome.

Zhang Qian's legacy endures as a symbol of exploration and bridge-building. He died around 114 BC, shortly after his final return, having spent over 25 years in service. Initially disgraced for battlefield losses against the Xiongnu, he was later elevated to grand messenger, one of the nine highest ministers. Today, he is celebrated as a national hero in China, with his tomb in Chenggu County preserved as a cultural site. President Xi Jinping has invoked him as a "friendly emissary" in modern Belt and Road Initiative speeches, linking ancient explorations to contemporary geopolitics.

In retrospect, Zhang Qian was not just an explorer but a catalyst for interconnectedness. His resilience in the face of captivity, his detailed observations, and his role in clarifying the west transformed China's worldview. Without his pioneering steps, the Silk Road might have remained a fragmented path; instead, it became a lifeline of human exchange, proving that one person's journey can alter the course of civilizations. His story reminds us of the power of curiosity and diplomacy in an often divided world.

# The New Silk Road: Pathways to a Changing World

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## Introduction

Throughout history, people have built roads to bring the world closer together. The ancient Silk Road was one of the greatest examples — a network that carried goods, ideas, and cultures across Asia, the Middle East, Africa, and Europe. It helped shape how civilizations grew and learned from one another. Today, the world faces new challenges: climate change, inequality, shifting power, and digital transformation. In this changing time, China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) — often called the New Silk Road — has become one of the largest efforts to connect countries again through trade, technology, and cooperation. Launched in 2013, the initiative aims to link continents through railways, ports, highways, and data networks. But beyond building infrastructure, it could reshape how countries work together. In a world where trust and stability are under strain, the New Silk Road may offer a way to rethink globalization, making it more balanced and inclusive. This essay explores what the New Silk Road could achieve as the world changes. It looks at how the initiative might support fairer trade, digital access, sustainability, regional growth, and cultural understanding—while also facing up to its risks and responsibilities.

## 1. Opening New Pathways for Trade

The first goal of the New Silk Road is to make global trade more balanced. For many years, the world's trade routes have been centered around oceans. Landlocked countries in Central Asia or inland parts of China, for example, have struggled to take part fully in global trade. The new network of railways and highways could begin to change that. Freight trains now run between western China and Europe, between cities like Xi'an, Chongqing, Duisburg, and Madrid — in about 15 days. This is faster than shipping by sea and cheaper than air delivery. These corridors don't just move goods, but also help connect remote areas to global supply chains. If managed well, these links could spread development more evenly. Entire regions far from the coast could attract new industries and jobs. European towns that once suffered economic decline could reconnect to Asian markets. The Silk Road, in that sense, can become a tool for shared growth rather than competition. Yet success will depend on how projects are handled. If deals lack transparency or ignore local needs, inequality could worsen. But with fair partnerships and environmental care, the New Silk Road could make globalization feel less like a system run by a few, and more like a genuinely shared network.

## 2. Technology as the New Trade Route

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, information may be more valuable than gold or silk ever were. The Digital Silk Road — the technology branch of the BRI — extends the idea of connection into cyberspace. It includes communication networks, e-commerce, satellites, and data cables. Across Africa, Central Asia, and Southeast Asia, Chinese technology companies are helping build internet infrastructure, mobile networks, and online payment systems. For many developing countries, these investments open doors to education, entrepreneurship, and innovation that were once out of reach. Digital links can also support better cooperation between nations. Shared platforms can help predict weather disasters, improve healthcare research, or connect classrooms through online learning. Still, these benefits come with challenges. Control over digital infrastructure also means control over data. Countries joining the Digital Silk Road will need strong rules to protect privacy and ensure fairness. If used responsibly, digital connections could help bridge the global technology gap and let smaller economies compete in a connected world.

## 3. Building a Greener Path

Climate change has become a major test for every development project, and the New Silk Road is no exception. Construction on such a large scale can stress ecosystems or increase carbon use if not planned carefully. However, it also brings a chance to create a greener model of growth. Many new Silk Road projects now include

renewable energy. Solar panels in Pakistan, wind power in Central Asia, and cleaner transport in Europe are examples of what China calls the “Green Silk Road.” If these efforts grow stronger, the network could help countries shift toward low-carbon economies. Environmental cooperation can also go further. Shared river systems, deserts, and forests link many of the nations along Silk Road routes. Working together to protect them could strengthen regional trust. The initiative could help standardize eco-friendly construction, promote sustainable farming, and fund clean energy technology. The biggest achievement would be a shift in thinking. From seeing development only in economic terms to seeing it as part of protecting the planet. If the Silk Road’s new routes are built with the Earth in mind, they might show that progress doesn’t have to come at nature’s expense.

#### **4. Encouraging Cooperation in a Divided World**

In recent years, political tension between global powers has made international cooperation harder. The New Silk Road could provide new spaces for dialogue and joint problem-solving, especially among developing countries that seek more influence in global affairs. Over 150 nations have now joined part of the BRI. If this growing network stays open and inclusive, it could give smaller countries a stronger voice. It doesn’t need to replace older international organizations like the United Nations but could work alongside them on practical projects, from building roads to sharing technology. The success of this cooperation will depend on trust. Genuine partnership must replace fear of dominance. The ancient Silk Road worked because no one owned it outright. It thrived through exchange and balance. The modern version must learn the same lesson. If countries use the Silk Road as a platform for shared progress instead of rivalry, it could renew multilateral spirit at a time when the world badly needs it.

#### **5. Reviving Cultural Understanding**

One of the most valuable parts of the ancient Silk Road was cultural exchange of art, ideas, and languages. The modern initiative could once again encourage curiosity and connection between people from very different societies.

Through scholarships, university partnerships, museum exhibitions, and tourism, cultures along the route are finding new ways to share their stories. Projects in Dunhuang, China, for example, have used digital technology to restore and share Buddhist cave art with global audiences.

In Central Asia, China has worked with local experts to protect historic mosques and palaces. Such exchanges are more than public relations. They can build understanding in a world that often feels divided. A student from Kazakhstan studying in Shanghai, or a Chinese musician performing in Turkey, carries with them a living piece of cultural exchange. If countries continue to promote this kind of connection, the New Silk Road could do more than move goods across continents. It could help break down stereotypes and renew the habit of listening to each other.

#### **6. Empowering Local Communities**

Large global projects often face criticism for ignoring local voices. For the New Silk Road to succeed, that pattern must change. True development happens when people living along the routes benefit and participate. When a railway or port is built, it should also bring training, jobs, and education for the surrounding communities. Programs that support local entrepreneurs, farmers, and small factories can make sure the benefits last long after the construction is done. Some early examples show this is possible. In Ethiopia and Kenya, for instance, new transport links have created opportunities for small businesses. In Central Asia, farmers now have quicker access to export markets. In Europe, the arrival of freight trains from China has revived city ports once seen as outdated. If local people see the Silk Road as something they own rather than something done to them, the project could become a model for fairer and people-centered globalization.

#### **7. A More Balanced Global Order**

The New Silk Road is not only about trade or infrastructure; it also represents a shift in how power and responsibility are shared in the world. For the first time in modern history, large-scale global development is being led by a non-Western country. That change reflects a deeper transformation — the rise of a more multifaceted world. This could make globalization more balanced. Instead of one single model of progress, there may now be many. Through the Silk Road, Asian, African, European, and Latin American countries can help define how globalization should work in the future. To succeed, however, China and its partners must show that leadership can be cooperative. The initiative will gain legitimacy only if it respects national sovereignty, local culture, and fair competition. Globalization built on equality rather than dominance would be its greatest achievement. The New Silk Road therefore carries symbolic weight: it suggests that the next stage of globalization should be shaped together, rather than following the pattern of one region or ideology.

## **8. Challenges and Conditions for Success**

The New Silk Road faces many obstacles. Some projects have led to debt problems, weak governance, or environmental harm. Others have been criticized for lacking transparency. These issues must be addressed if the initiative is to realize its potential. To be a genuine force for progress, three principles will be essential: Transparency must be of paramount importance. Financial deals and project plans should be open to public and international oversight so communities can hold decisionmakers accountable. Fairness must also be present. Projects must protect workers' rights, share profits fairly, and respect. Moreover, sustainability is also significant. Development should protect natural ecosystems and future generations, not sacrifice them for short-term growth. Meeting these conditions will take patience and honest dialogue among all partners. But if they are met, the New Silk Road could shift from being a Chinese-led project to a broadly shared global effort. One that stands for trust, cooperation, and mutual benefit.

## **Conclusion**

The modern world is at a crossroads. We are more connected than ever before, yet also more divided by fear, competition, and inequality. Climate change, technological change, and political tensions threaten to pull us apart. In this uncertain time, the New Silk Road offers a chance to rebuild a sense of shared purpose. Its greatest promise does not lie only in ports, railways, or digital cables, but in what those connections represent—a belief that building something together can still matter in a divided world. The new routes could create fairer trade, cleaner industry, and richer cultural exchange. They could help turn globalization from a contest into a conversation. But this outcome is not automatic. It will depend on whether the Silk Road remains open, cooperative, and respectful of human and environmental needs. In that sense, it is a test of our collective imagination. If we succeed, the New Silk Road could revive what made the ancient one so powerful; the idea that what unites us is stronger than what divides us. It could show that prosperity and peace are not opposites, but two sides of the same journey. And in an age of uncertainty, that vision may be exactly what the world needs most.

# Reviving the Silk Road

*St. Joseph's College, Au, Yik Chun – 17*

The Silk Roads, 114 BC–1450 AD

The Silk Roads are a long series of trade routes from China all the way to Rome, through which goods were traded and cultures were shared throughout the Mediterranean and the greater Eurasian landmass. It facilitated the trade of silk, gunpowder and jade from China with the rest of the world and China through export trade in the Silk Roads became one of the most powerful economies in the ancient world.

The trade routes are incredibly long and dangerous. These days, attempting to travel along these roads sees travellers going through endless hills of scorching desert, taking 7 to 8 hours in car a day to reach the next tavern or hostel. Seeing how hard the journey still is with modern modes of transport, it is hard to imagine how the ancient traders managed the journeys carrying their products and goods. Amazingly, it stood strong for millennia and a half until the collapse of the Mongol empire in the 14th century after which the Silk Road gradually declined into disuse.

During the heyday of the Silk Roads, culture was one of its main exports. For proof of this, we can visit the ancient Sogdian city ruins in Panjakent, Tajikistan, which lies on one of the Silk Roads' branches. At the site in Panjakent, archaeologists uncovered murals from the 6th and 8th centuries AD depicting different literary works, including the Indian Panchatantra and even Aesop's Fables. Additionally, the mural borrow stylistic influences from China, the Indian Subcontinent and Rome. [UNESCO website] This illustrates the spread and merging of different cultures along the Silk Road. It is also well-established that many religious beliefs spread towards the East through the Silk Road. Buddhism and the Abrahamic faiths such as Christianity and Islam first entered China by religious clergy along the Silk Road, and Buddhism through these trade routes even crossed into ancient Japan and Korea. Notably, the Buddhist monasteries along the route provided a rest stop for traders, converting many to Buddhism. It is possible to cite the Silk Road's existence as one of the main reasons Buddhism is so prevalent across Asia and Eastern Europe today. Additionally, the Silk Roads also enabled the sharing and merging of cultural traditions. There is an example of syncretism (the combining of distinct beliefs) between Xiongnu nomads and the Chinese, with the Xiongnu adopting Chinese agricultural techniques, dressing and lifestyle and China adopting the Xiongnu military techniques and dances. [Old World Encounters: Cross-Cultural Contacts and Exchanges in Pre-Modern Times, 1993]. This was only possible because of the Silk Roads where nomads, traders, and travellers walked upon.

The Silk Roads may have since been lost to time, but the dream of a way to connect the hearts of different societies never vanished. When expeditionists and researchers uncovered the forgotten travel routes in Central Asia which branched deep into Europe, people were entranced and the dreams of reviving the Silk Road begun.

### The Silk Roads Today

Nowadays, there is an international push to revive the Silk Roads, with efforts coordinated through UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization). The international agency's 'Silk Road Programme' aims to reconstruct the Silk Roads through sharing traditional knowledge and culture and to allow different societies to influence, support and benefit each other, enriching each and every aspect of the Eurasian plate. To quote the previous Director General of UNESCO Audrey Azoulay, "we must learn from the exchanges that took place along the Silk Roads. These exchanges weaved connections between peoples and cultures across Asia and Europe — with this in mind, we can work to foster much needed dialogue and mutual respect going forward." In an increasingly closed off society, where minute differences between societies are enough to spark conflict and war, connecting peoples' cultures can bring together peoples' hearts, Linking humanity together via the Silk Roads once again.

UNESCO's Silk Roads Programme provides many resources to weave our many worlds and cultures together. Many initiatives have been set in motion with this scheme, with this platform notably supported by not just

powerful countries like China and Germany, but also smaller governments like Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Oman. Some of these countries are often in conflict internally or with each other, but there is hope this programme may serve a role in mending the rifts between people of different nationalities. Hopefully, this platform will be able to bring forth peace in one of the most volatile regions in the world.

One of the ways this platform attempts to accomplish its goals is through research and knowledge. In 2025, the Silk Roads Papers 3rd edition was published, with research sponsored by the Silk Roads Young Research Grant, covering topics in Archaeology, Architecture, Monuments and Urbanism, Arts, Humanities and Philosophy, Faith and Spiritualities, Gastronomy and Food Production, Languages and Literature, Science and Technology, and Women and Traditional Know-how. The research done by various investigators from different countries, many with different nationality, religious beliefs and societal beliefs on the history, culture and situation on these regions connected by the Silk Roads. This both enlivens communication between people of different cultures and encourages a new generation of researchers and investigators to harbour an interest in the Silk Roads, to learn about and develop the regions and to continue forging connections between the various regions. Additionally, with support of the National Commission of the People's Republic of China for UNESCO, the Silk Roads Youth Research Grant was launched back in 2021, reducing the financial strain of newcomers of the field for delving into the investigations about the Silk Roads. All this effort can build a future where knowledge and culture are celebrated, where lesser-known countries can grow and have awareness on them increase, and have their situation be shared internationally through the United Nations. UNESCO's Silk Road Program also features other pieces made by like-minded investigators on these places and their cultures, history and values for people to read and learn more from.

In addition to the aforementioned papers and grants, UNESCO also holds the Youth Eyes on the Silk Roads International Photo Contest, encouraging young participants to submit photographs according to a specific theme. The Contest is separated into 2 categories, Category 1 for people aged 14–17, and Category 2 for participants aged 18–25. Last year in 2025, aiming to highlight the roles of women historically and contemporarily and build more inclusive societies, the 7th edition of the contest had the theme “Woman, Guardians of Heritage”. The winners of Category 1 of this edition includes Zhang from China, Pulodi from Tajikistan and Nguyễn from Viet Nam respectably, while the winners for the 2nd Division includes Bavehie from Iran, Nayem from Bangladesh and Fahriyadi from Indonesia . [Youth Eyes on the Silk Roads Photo Contest] These photographs display stunning moments of life from all these countries. The showcase of these cultures in these regions highlights variety in life, and how the life in all these communities continues to flourish onwards. Primarily, the scenes of women engaging in traditional craftsmanship and work can highlight the strength individual women can hold to support the economy of these regions. Words cannot describe accurately the beauty captured in these images, and I highly encourage readers to check out the competitions and the photos submitted out for themselves.

These programs from UNESCO put high emphasis on youth interest in the Silk Roads. By introducing a new generation to the Silk Roads, the unique cultures and activities from these regions can be shared and passed on. After all, as they say, the future is in the youth's hands. Another theme that is emphasised is cultural exchange. As previously mentioned, differences in beliefs and cultures can cause conflicts between people and nations, but through these aforementioned programmes, people can learn to accept one another even with the differences between each other. This can grow hope in our hearts that peace may be attained.

## Conclusion

The growing interest in the silk roads can only serve to unite people. After all, culture is a means of breeding togetherness. By learning each others' cultures and backgrounds and promoting acceptance of our differences, we can grow as neighbours and help each other develop, supporting each other in attaining better living standards and industrial and technological development. The Silk Roads have the power to unite us children of the world together and let us see tomorrow's sunrise as friends. As citizens of the Earth, I hope the Silk Roads can continue to bring us close to one another and together, we can celebrate our unique and storied history and culture while awaiting a brighter future.

# New Tales of China's Silk Road

*St. Margaret's Coeducational English Secondary and Primary School, Fong, Chun Yat – 15*

China's silk road, where do we even begin? Spanning across the heart of 40 different countries such as China, India and Egypt, the road had played an important role in structuring our modern society 2150 years ago. Despite its old age the silk road's importance hasn't diminished a bit when in fact I believe that there would be more civilisation-changing stories to tell, as the story of the silk road is just getting started.

Firstly, I would like to go through a quick background and history on the infamous silk road. From 130 BCE to the mid-15th century, the road was active across 40 different countries. It promoted the trade of items and services and exchange of knowledge on technologies and traditions between countries. The road stretched roughly 6400 – 9000 kilometers in length. Though the silk road is named a "road", it is more of a vast network of routes on land which are connected with each other to cover such a daunting distance. During the times when it was active merchants would walk such distances to trade with fellow merchants from the foreign lands. An example would be a Chinese merchant going to Egypt to exchange premium Chinese silk for gold or jewellery. They would see the fragrant orchards of the middle world displaying their exotic fruits such as pomegranates for sale, they would cross through the "Sea of Death" being the Taklamakan desert with its relentless crescent-shaped dunes, and finally with a change from dry desert and rock they go through the humid Papyrus jungles which is home to hippos and flowers of all kinds laying on the riverbed. The one-way journey would take roughly 7 months to a year, but such trips weren't uncommon for merchants which are ambitious for a chance to sell such Chinese exotics at a high price.

Trades and economic growth weren't the only benefit brought to the countries which were involved in the silk road, the interactions with individuals from their respective countries laid the foundation for a strong and healthy relationship between each other. The notable example would be the relationship between the Chinese Han Dynasty and the Wusun People (near the modern-day Kazakhstan). During that period, China was under constant attack by the Xiongnu people (Mongolian). As China engaged in economic transactions and trades on the silk road, their relations with the Wusun People were better, which led to the "Heavenly Horse Alliance" to be formed. China gave the Wusun People caravans bolted with fine gold, silk and tools in exchange for the sturdy, fast and reliable "Heavenly horses" which were used to push back the Xiongnu People.

Although sadly the silk road has been inactive for more than 1500 years, its significant historical value and effects are facts which are still known by almost everyone till this day. Therefore, I believe that the story of the silk road will not come to an end, and soon there will be a revitalization effort to restore the silk road back to its former glory. Upon the revitalization China will definitely play a key role once again in capitalising on the opportunities presented by the silk road. One sector which would benefit with no doubt would be the tourism industry. China has been modernising at a never before seen rapid pace, developing metropolises, infrastructure and attractions all for attracting tourists and creating an image where China would be a first world tourist hub. As the silk road has had its road structures and layout on the map long ago, they could reuse the same routes and layouts to promote outbound and inbound tourism for all 40 countries. Reaching out to 4.9 billion people is an astounding feat, by promoting tourism with the silk road countries it would also improve relations and deepen understanding of each other's culture and traditions like the old days.

Speaking of the re-emergence of old benefits, the silk road could once again promote economic growth and prosperity between countries. With the recent unstable political affairs going on in the Americas related the tariffs, economic uncertainty is a heated topic among political leaders at this current time as many economies and currencies heavily rely on business or the conversion rate of the Americas and the American Dollar. In that case

the re-emergence of the silk road would be the perfect fix to the current situation. Instead of the trade of tangible goods in person in the old days, they could also modernise the situation again by opening up the markets or promoting services and products between countries. There could be contracts with the highly talented skilled labour of India. There could be agreements with the “black gold” old manufacturers of the Middle East. There could be the outsourcing of certain business functions in developing countries such as Kazakhstan. With cooperation the sky’s the limit. The cherry on top is that this proposal isn’t unrealistic as China has already had major contributions in this field. With the Belt and Road Initiative, many countries included in the original silk road have heard of or are a part of the Belt and Road Initiative which helps boost global connectivity, cultural investment and trade. This means that with the support of the participating countries other countries would also be likely to be a part of such a win-win opportunity to enrich the quality of life and living standards of the residents of their respective countries.

Instead of allowing the silk road to be a golden memory of the Chinese dynasty era, it could be a golden opportunity for China to once again capitalise on the road to present itself and reap the benefits of foreign relations and globalization with her fellow neighbouring countries. And who knows? Having the silk road's legacy live on to prosper another day. To serve once again as a push for more further opportunities of cooperation, alliances and contracts to build the foundation of modernising the neighbouring countries. Being so the sky is once again the limit for what we could achieve.

# New Tales of China's Silk Road

*St. Margaret's Coeducational English Secondary and Primary School, Ho, Cheuk Lam – 16*

## Introduction

Silk Road, a bookmarked page in the history of China and the Middle East, a symbol of cultural exchange and economic prosperity that spanned over 1500 years, and of course, the first time China had opened its doors to foreigners. These had been taught as a major topic in the junior secondary Chinese history syllabus. However, how many know that the Silk Road was created from “serendipity”? How many can tell that it was and why it was revived in 2013?

In this article, we will take an adventure of time, investigate how the Silk Road was "serendipitally" created, the decline of the ancient Silk Road, as well as why it was revived 12 years ago. Sit tight and let's begin!

## The birth of the Silk Road

The Silk Road traces its origin to the Han Dynasty, primarily initiated by Emperor Wu. Back in the old days, Wu suffered from the invasion of the formidable Xiongnu tribe, who dominated the western regions, hindering potential national security issues to the Han Dynasty. Resultly, Wu had asked Zhang Qian to undertake a crucial mission— to forge an alliance with the Yuezhi against the formidable Xiongnu tribes. During the trip, this ambitious endeavor had been captured by the Xiongnu, Zhang was poisoned for 13 years. After finally escaping, Zhang navigated the treacherous landscapes of modern-day Xinjiang, ultimately reaching the Yuezhi, renowned for their agricultural skills. Yet, the Yuezhi's reluctance to engage in conflict with the Xiongnu hindered his efforts to solidify immediate military alliances.

Despite his failure to induce Yuezhi's alignment against Xiongnu, Zhang presented bright insights about sophisticated civilizations to the west, enlightening the Emperor's interest in trade opportunities that could greatly benefit the Han dynasty. Zhang's missions laid the essential groundwork for the Silk Road. His subsequent attempts to initiate trade with the Wusun in 119 BC further exemplified the challenges he faced while navigating a complex geopolitical landscape. These obstacles not only shaped the evolution of trade routes connecting China to the west but also played a crucial role in the emergence of the Silk Road, a significant artery of cultural and economic exchange.

After years of development, the ancient Silk Road wasn't solely about materialistic trading, it was a process of cultural and intellectual exchange and development. Traders from the Middle East carried spice and silk on camels to trade along the road ° Not only did they carry products, but also their religion, philosophies, art and technology. Take Buddhism as an example, the spread of Buddhism from India to China would not have been possible without the trade routes of the Silk Road, and Buddhism would not become the currently biggest recognised religion in China without the cultural exchange in the Silk Road.

## The Decline of the Silk Road

You might wonder, shouldn't this unprecedented trade route last forever? Why would it only last for 150 centuries?

The flourishing trade of the Silk Road began to decline by the mid-15th century, with the rise of maritime trade routes during the age of exploration. Before the era, on land was the only way to transport goods, and the markets were mostly localised. After the era, it transformed into a globally interconnected world with vast colonial empires, spreading European languages and cultures worldwide. Trading networks had been widened and fastened with trading towards the west, while European powers sought direct trading with the east, prioritizing sea routes over land that required less time and prevented conflicts with the land locals. Hence, the irreplaceable status of the Silk Road had been brutally chopped off at the waist, making the once-busy, symbolising prosperity Silk Road buried into the sand of time.

The revive of the belt and road initiative (BRI)

The revival of the belt and road initiative was proposed by China in 2013, driven by a multitude of aspects. The major concerns include the economic need of global cooperations that leads to economic growth after the 2008 financial crisis, China's financial goal to internationalise the Renminbi, and political reason to promote regional development with the Middle East countries, which also act as a response to the US "Pivot to Asia" strategy.

Similar to the ancient Silk Road, the BRI enhances connectivity and trade among countries to promote development and collaboration in terms of trade, cultural exchange and infrastructure development that benefits all people. However, the BRI involves more geopolitical motives, such as to bargain for the support of the Middle East, extending Chinese influence to defend challenges brought from the west, which then later intensified the political relationship between the west and China.

In addition, BRI also suffers with environmental sustainability friction, especially after the signation of the Paris agreement to reduce greenhouse gases emission.

### Summary

It is undoubtful that the Silk Road was created "unintensioned", however it laid a foundation for the unprecedented network of trade and cultural exchanges. While the once-flourished ancient Silk Road declined unfortunately, the modern one had revived though the Belt and Road initiative, as nations strive to enhance connectivity. Would the legacy of the Silk Road continue in the contemporary world?

# The Very First Silk Road Travelers

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The Silk Road was a critical trading route system that was used in the connection of China with Central Asia and the Middle East, as well as Europe, in the pre-modern road, plane, and technology eras. Still, it was not an easy trip. It was undertaken by bold merchant-travelers, explorers, nomads, and monks who encountered many hazards on their way through grasslands, savannahs, and deserts along the way. It was important that these ancient explorers played a key role in the evolution of civilization in the modern world, and their boldness and curiosity led to the successful sharing of goods, ideas, and cultures, which affects us today in many ways.

The Chinese merchants comprised the largest number of the initial travelers along the Silk Road. They would carry porcelainware, tea, silk, and spices. The merchants would either walk, use camels, or even take boats through rivers. This was because the above goods were in high demand in distant lands. This would sometimes take several months and even several years before they could reach their destinations. They could endure the hardships, considering the benefits they could enjoy through trade.

Zhang Qian, a Chinese explorer and diplomat of the Han Dynasty dated around 138 BCE, is one of the earliest and most famous explorers in history. Zhang Qian's expedition is a great example because he was sent by the emperor in order to find allies against nomadic tribes that were threatening China's northern borders. During his expedition, he passed through Central Asia and even as far as present-day Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. Zhang Qian discovered the culture and traditions of so many different races and people such as Tocharians and Scythians. Thanks to his expeditions and adventures in foreign lands that were beyond China's borders, China learned about the rich and varied progress. His research proved that a road network could link China and the West. Despite the risks associated with his mission, in which he was apprehended and briefly imprisoned, his persistence paid off. His narratives promoted commerce and paved the way for the creation of what would become known as the Silk Road. Buddhist monks traveled the Silk Road to propagate their faith, in addition to traders and diplomats. Monks like Xuanzang traveled thousands of miles across hostile deserts, and craggy mountains on their way from China to India in the first century CE. Xuanzang's journey was especially particular, he traveled from China to study sacred Buddhist texts in India before returning home with teachings and scriptures to impart to his native country.

Over the course of his more than ten-year journey, Xuanzang encountered extreme weather, bandits, and starvation. However, being driven by his faith and resolve, he travelled the Himalayas and the Taklamakan Desert. Many others were motivated to pursue similar paths by his tales of tenacity and spiritual commitment.

In the earlier stages of the Silk Route, nomads and local tribes also played important parts. There were several nomad tribes who roamed along with their flocks of sheep, goats, and camels in Central Asia's grasslands. Since they knew this region better, these nomads acted as middlemen and guides to lead traders through the paths of mountains and deserts safely when traders had to cross unknown regions in order to complete their Silk Route journeys.

These first explorers were driven, despite the challenges faced, such as heat, sandstorms, and mountain ranges, because they valued the importance of meeting different civilizations.

As a result of these journeys, an infrastructure that linked China to Persia, Rome, and other regions was founded. This was not limited to the trading of goods; the transfer of ideas, art, and technology was also made possible through these journeys. The earliest adventurers were incredibly daring and curious; they were willing to risk their lives to reach new destinations and contact other distant civilizations. They set the foundation for a world where interactions among different civilizations would be felt for centuries to come in the aspects of technology, science, arts, and religion. The Silk Road began as a trade route and came to symbolize the unity and understanding of several civilizations.

The courageous explorers' spirit lives on until today. Along the Silk Road, modern explorers, scientists, and diplomats are still constructing bridges between nations. Their journey reflects the bravery of Xuanzang, Zhang Qian, and countless nomads. They serve as a reminder that human nature includes a desire to connect, learn, and share.

In summary, the earliest travelers on the Silk Road were explorers, adventurers, and pioneers in addition to traders. Despite the tremendous risks and difficulties they encountered, their perseverance influenced the path of history. Their travels demonstrated that, motivated by curiosity and a need for connection, people had the guts to explore the unknown even in ancient times. Till now, we are still inspired by their tales, knowing that the power of exploration and understanding can bring the world closer together.

# New Tales of China's Silk Road

*St. Margaret's Coeducational English Secondary and Primary School, Wang Kit, Lo – 15*

The Silk Road was a deal for a very long time. It was like a long conversation between different cultures and places. This conversation was not fast it was slow.

The Silk Road went from Chang'an to the Mediterranean. The people who traveled on the Silk Road didn't just carry silk and spices. They also carried ideas and things like Buddhism and mathematics. The Silk Road helped spread Buddhism to the west and mathematics to the east. It also helped spread a lot of new things. Then something changed. The Silk Road was not used much anymore. People started using boats to travel across the sea. The empires that were in power started to change too.

Today, people are talking about the idea again. This time it is for the 21st century.

The Belt and Road Initiative was started in 2013. The Belt and Road Initiative is not one road, it is a big network of things like roads, computer connections and trade agreements that cover more than 150 countries. It is like what people did a long time ago, how people wanted connect with each other but now we have new ways to do it. Now, we have trains where they're used to be just tracks, in the desert. We have computer systems to help people trade with each other, where before they just used papers to keep track of things. The Belt and Road Initiative is a deal because it is changing how countries work together. A freight train can leave from Xi'an, which is also known as the Chang'an and get to London in less than 2 weeks where it used to take half a year to make this trip. Distance is not a problem anymore. We have engineering and we are all connected now so we are not isolated like we used to be. The freight train going from Xi'an to London is an example of this.

The new stories are made of buildings and computer stuff. In Greece, the Port of Piraeus used to have problems. Now it is doing great because of the money from China. It is a busy place in the Mediterranean and it gives jobs to a lot of local people. In an area of Laos, a young woman who makes things sells her clothes and other things directly to stores in Europe. She does this using a phone network that was made possible by people working together on the Belt and Road Initiative. Now she can sell her things to people all over the continent not just her village. The Belt and Road Initiative is helping people like this woman. Another example is, in Kenya people work together in a lab that uses Chinese AI technology to look at information about the environment. They use this technology to help protect animals. This new way of working is not really about expensive things, it is more like moving goods from one place to another, finding new ways to be kind, to the earth.

As good as this plan sounds, this big plan has some problem too. People who are against it say that countries taking part might get much debt they cannot pay back. They also say building things like road and bridges can hurt the environment. There are concerns about people not being treated fairly and that no one knows what is really going on. The question is if the new Silk Road is a success, does it help people and make others rely on it. Does the system really care about what the local people want or does it just do what it wants and force its plan on the area. The local needs are very important which is why there still might be some problems that are needed to be solved in this system.

The old Silk Road was really good because it helped people go back and forth and learn from each other. The new Silk Road is like that too. Now it is all around the world. A time ago people who traveled wanted to know who was out there. Now we know the answer to that question. The big question now is: now that the Silk Road connects all of us, what will we make or create together on it? The answer will determine whether this new tale becomes a story of shared prosperity and innovation, or a cautionary one of overreach and imbalance. If it can harness its vast network for inclusive and sustainable development, then the Silk Road will be used again like it used to be.

# Threads of Connection

*St. Paul's Convent School, Tsz Hei Hailey, Cheng – 15*

A group of travelers tramp across the Taklamakan Desert, under the scorching sun their camels sway side by side supporting the unbearable weight of shimmering bolts of silk, each worth far more than treasures from distant lands. The air is thick with clouds of dust, the horizon seems impossible to reach... Yet, promises of prosperity give these travelers a glimmer of hope, driving them towards their land of fortune.

For more than two millennia, the Silk Road has captured the imaginations of historians, travelers and dreamers alike. It was never just a simple, singular highway linking one place to another; it was a sprawling network stretching across thousands of miles culturally bridging and connecting China's ancient capital Chang'an beyond distant cities of Rome and Constantinople. Along its dusty paths and bustling streets, spices were traded for cattle, silk was traded for glass and ideas were exchanged for inventions. It was a road of commerce and culture, one filled with capacity for imagination.

Today, as the world faces new challenges of globalisation, climate change and shifting political power, the Silk Road that has once reached its end has been reborn in the form of China's Belt and Road initiative. This modern revival, launched in 2013 seeks to launch more than 150 countries in a vast web of trade and infrastructure. As this new project is kicked off, echoes of the past resound in the form of its widespread effect of cultural fusion on the world, reminding us that the Silk Road has always been more than just a means for trade, but rather it focuses on the different skill sets and techniques people can learn from each other and the opportunities that come in a shared society.

So, how did the ancient Silk Road develop into its current form?

Twenty-two centuries ago during the Han dynasty, emissaries and merchants were sent to travel westwards with their bolts of silk—a fabric so prized it became a currency of prestige in Rome and Byzantium. The journey was rocky, to say the least. Crossing deserts like the Gobi and Taklamakan, climbing across mountains in the Pamirs, negotiating with dangerous tribes along the way, the emissaries carried the hopes of an empire. These first batches of travelers were more than traders, they were cultural ambassadors innovating and paving the way for further cultural development. As these pioneers stepped forward, trading their paper and porcelain for grapes and pomegranates, the Silk Road was gradually being established.

The ancient Silk Road kicked off in China's ancient capital, Chang'an. Before the implementation, Chang'an had already been the largest city in the world, serving as an independent metropolis. With the cultural and tangible exchange along the Silk Road, it developed into a culturally diverse haven and the beating heart of the Silk Road. Picture this: As you walk along the streets of Chang'an, an aromatic smell of Arabic fragrance fills your nostrils, while Persian carpets dazzle brightly in the corner of your eye and Roman glassware capture your attention by sparkling brightly like jewels under the sun; the sound of foreign vendors shouting out unfamiliar languages echoing in the streets, while Buddhist monks were exchanging heated debates with Daoist sages... In this city, it was as if each and every alleyway extended its friendly arm to offer a chance for cultural exchange, to offer a chance for the East and West to merge and fuse to create a cultural symphony.

Aside from its developing sites of cultural exchange, the ancient Silk Road's legacy embodied a conveyor belt of cultural wonders. Foods like peaches, apricots and tea traveled westward; rice, figs and olives journeyed eastward. Inventions like papermaking and gunpowder transformed societies beyond China. Artistic styles blended: Persian themes appeared in Chinese textiles while Buddhist statues in Central Asia bore Greco-Roman features. Ideas travelled too, Buddhism spread from China to India, changing the place's philosophy and art. Islam reached beyond Central Asia. Even medical knowledge

like herbs, surgical techniques, and theories surrounding the body crossed borders, the Silk Road essentially served as a laboratory of human creativity, with numerous cultural exchanges, later on motivating the start of iconic cultural revolutions such as the Renaissance.

For over 1500 years, the Silk Road thrived and inspired many changes in society. However, it started to die down by the mid 1400s when there was a rise of maritime trade routes and global instability. As commerce started to shift to the seas, Mongol Empire's started their collapse where political stability was threatened and the Black Death carried along trade routes devastated populations. By the time Vancouver da Gama sailed to India and officially marked the rise of maritime commerce, the Silk Road's influence had dwindled. Yet, the memory of this iconic system lingered in many people's minds. The idea of fusion between the East and the West remained powerful, inspiring scholars, poets and explorers to find ways to continue this idea and implement it in their works.

Despite the dying down of the ancient Silk Road being tragic, its legacy was rekindled in 2013, when China introduced the launching of a modern Silk Road in their Belt and Road initiative (BRI). Unlike its ancient predecessor, this project is based on clearer means, with railways, highways, ports and digital networks all being planned to accommodate the modern Silk Road. Spanning across 150 countries, the modern Silk Road seeks to revive the spirit of connection between people despite their differences. Just as silk once linked empires and caravans once carried spices, now fibre-optics link economies and cargo ship carry electronics. In the midst of a fragmented world lacking connection, the new Silk Road can build bridges, connecting people once more.

Lets immerse ourselves in a world where the new Silk Road can bring about collaborations like it once did: Imagine African farmers exporting coffee to china via new railways. Picture European engineers collaborating with Asian scientists on improving and developing renewable energy. Envision students from Kazakhstan studying in Beijing. The possibilities the new Silk Road could achieve is truly endless! No matter ancient or modern, the Silk Road's greatest contribution to society had always been cultural exchange and learning. In today's world, we are urgently faced with global problems like climate crises, political divisions and pollution. It is all the more important for cooperation and collaboration to be achieved so people can work together in a united manner on developing solutions to solve these problems. Although it may sound hard, the bringing about of the new Silk Road could possibly solve this problem by implementing itself as a road of sustainability where green technologies can be developed and shared. It could also act as a road of peace, where dialogue resolves conflict. Finally, it could act as a road of imagination, where cultures are shared and inspire one another.

Behind every caravan, ship and railway are human stories. The first batch of merchants who braved deserts, the Tang dynasty poets who wrote of foreign lands, the medieval monks who carried scriptures... These are all fascinating tales that shape the Silk Road into something more than just history. It is a reminder that in the midst of all the discoveries and trades occurring in the Silk Road, people are the most vital part of this. While breakthroughs and discoveries contribute to society as a whole, people's connections, experiences and creativity derived from the Silk Road is the most significant treasure discovered from the Silk Road, no matter ancient or modern.

The Silk Road is a living idea. From the first bolts of silk carried westwards for exchange, it reflected humanity's desire to connect, learn, grow and to dream. Even as the world changes and if the Silk Road collapses, its revival has proved that the Silk Road is not a relic, but more so a profound ideology to bring about new tales in the world. In ports, classrooms, laboratories and friendship across borders, the Silk Road is not only China's gift to the world, but a shared journey that everyone is encouraged to embark on.

Like silk, strong yet delicate, the Silk Road powerfully weaves us together.

# New Tales of China's Silk Road

*St. Paul's Convent School, Lau , Sum Yu – 16*

The Silk Road, one of the most astonishing achievements of ancient China. It is a route spanning 4000 miles, extending across some of the most perilous landscapes to connect the East and the West. Its impact is truly undeniable, with it being the catalyst for the economic growth of many countries. But that is not to say it has not brought its fair share of horrors. Despite all that, it is still one of the founding pillars to the development of modern society.

It all started in the Han Dynasty. Emperor Wu had wanted to expand his territory into Northern China and even onwards, where they discovered that there was a completely new world outside their scope. He knew he could take this opportunity to expand his power, and so, he sought to find a way to open trade routes to these Western regions. But the environment was treacherous, they had little to no information about the whereabouts of the Western civilization.

The journey toward creating these routes had required painstaking efforts. The environment contained numerous dangers, including but not limited to scorching deserts and high mountain ranges. The dynasty lacked detailed or reliable knowledge of the exotic lands, and the terrain was riddled with bandits and hostile tribes. This was in no shape or form a safe pathway for merchants.

Emperor Wu sent envoys and diplomats to scout out the surroundings, aiming to establish a safe trade route for easier transport and exchange. One of the envoys, Zhang Qian, played a pivotal role in the mission. When he returned from his journey, he had obtained invaluable information regarding the Western civilization, marking the first success of the Silk Road.

His reports were the baseline for every mission thereafter, opening possibilities for further exploration and collaboration. He had introduced to ancient China new cultures, goods, and also potential trading partners and allies. Subsequent missions were based accordingly, all vying to establish secure and safe trade routes and long-lasting diplomatic exchanges.

These routes later evolved into a sophisticated chain of pathways, reaching all over land and the sea. This entire process required centuries of work across quite a few generations. After everything they had done, it finally came to fruition.

The primary contribution of the Silk Road would undoubtedly be its impact on the economy of the regions involved. Since the routes facilitated the trade of luxury goods such as silk, spices, and gold, they have created a large amount of wealth for merchant cities and empires along the Silk Road. The continuous trade between the East and the West stimulated the local economies, and further encouraged the development of markets to accommodate for the increasing demand. With the wealth they obtained from trading, they could then invest that amount of money into different aspects of society, propelling the development of commercial infrastructure.

The Silk Road was also a link for different cultures and beliefs to spread to different parts of the world. Not only did the merchants carry goods along with them on the route, they also carried their own beliefs. Many different religions have been hence carried over to East Asia as a result, influencing societies to develop their own belief systems and inspiring their art forms. The beautiful thing about this exchange is that no beliefs remain perfectly the same in each country, they slowly develop their own uniqueness, whether if it's presented in the way the texts are preserved and translated, or how differently each region interprets their word.

Let us not forget about the four most famous inventions spread from the Silk Road. Paper making, printing, gunpowder, and the compass. These four inventions are why we have such developed societies. If any of these inventions had not been transmitted to other countries, it is quite possible that today's society would not be as developed as it is at the moment. If paper making hadn't been introduced, every single piece of information would have needed to be recorded in much more expensive and inefficient ways. With less convenient ways of

transmitting information, the literacy rate would be far lower, and many ancient texts may be lost today from the passing of time. In regard to the long term impacts, other technological advancements that have been made precisely due to the popularization of paper would have lesser impact. Without the Silk Road, the knowledge of the method in other nations would've been significantly delayed.

As for gunpowder, it is what encouraged the development of military devices. Though truth be told, if gunpowder hadn't been introduced, perhaps there would be less wars and casualties in today's society. But conflicts would arise all the same. Without gunpowder, what we have in excess, for example, tanks, missiles and such, their development may have been delayed for hundreds of years. The compass has allowed people to navigate across foreign lands with relatively more ease, and facilitated exploration all across the globe. One of the many notable achievements and examples would be Christopher Columbus, someone who, with the aid of the compass, finished his voyage to what he believed was Asia. But he was the one who discovered natives living on the land, and played a pivotal role in forming what we know today as America.

Ancient China has exported a lot of their own innovations across the routes, but the civilization itself has also been enriched by the influx of foreign ideas and cultures from neighboring countries. This is a good example of how human civilization tends to rely on mutually beneficial exchanges and how the ongoing support between countries has influenced the heritage and culture of each single one.

Moreover, the Silk Road has allowed empires to establish stable relations with other territories, securing alliances and treaties around the regions. They quickly recognized the importance of having long-lasting alliances, and the mutual benefits they would receive from maintaining a steady flow of trade and the stability of their region. It's been said that for the countries that have participated in the Silk Road, their cooperations have held strong even when there were clashes in political or military views, instead choosing peaceful negotiations in favor of using force, or resorting to war. They also often held meetings to discuss how to keep the merchants safe when traveling about to do trade or deliver information. With the Silk Road acting as a bridge for consistent communication, disputes would often be solved quickly without escalating. Hence, it played a vital role in maintaining a relatively peaceful period of time back then.

The contributions the Silk Road has given to this world are undeniable. But that is not to say that it has brought nothing but good. The Silk Road has led to many tragic accidents and casualties, including the spreading of the Black Death. It had originated in Central Asia, and from then on, it was carried along by rodents and flies along the route. Ultimately carrying the plague that would later cause the death of millions all the way to the Middle East and Europe. Yes, the Silk Road had been instrumental in improving the economy of Europe back then through the export of luxury goods, but it had also been the indirect cause for the widespread deaths, with mortality rates being as high as 80% in certain regions.

Even in the olden times, people in power still naturally have the most benefits. The Silk Road has significantly contributed to the hugely accumulated amount of wealth for the people in charge and the wealth disparity between the rich and the poor. The rulers or the merchants in charge could often reap the most benefits from monopolizing the trade routes, whereas the relatively more common trade merchants were exploited. They would encounter a lot of troubles on the way just to make a living, for instance, being taxed by the people in charge of those trading routes, or falling victim to theft by thieves and bandits. They were taken advantage of, and their earnings would dwindle a lot because of it, making them struggle to even survive day by day.

As we all know, the old Silk Road went into decline soon after the rise of oversea routes by Europeans, who were interested in seeking a faster and safer passage as they didn't prefer having to traverse through those treacherous environments. And using ships were not only more efficient, but they could also carry more cargo along with them with a lower risk level. With the gradual disregard for overland routes, the Silk Road started to be neglected, and eventually was no longer used by merchants anymore. And that was how it fell into decline for about six centuries.

Thankfully, China revitalized the Silk Road to boost its economy by opening new markets and creating a more integrated trade market between countries. The benefits provided to modern society would be slightly different than that before, but the essence remains the same.

One of the benefits the new Silk Road could provide would be how much it could increase global economic growth. Through collaborating and working with foreign countries, the trading of goods and manpower could be cheaper than those who are not participating in this project. This not only benefits China, but is extremely advantageous for developing countries. Many developing countries are eager to improve its economies, but are unable to do so due to a lack of resources and finance. The Silk Road could reduce the barriers between these countries and potential partners, allowing them to export their own products more easily to foreign countries at a much lower cost.

Also, since the barriers between countries are lessened through this project, manpower could be transported using a much less complicated process, allowing the people in developing countries to go abroad for better and more job opportunities, improving the economy as a whole as well as improving their own quality of life. As the participating countries are interconnected, they would rely on, for example, developing countries for projects such as manufacturing or agriculture. They would start having an influx of requests for work, and the economy would be boosted from their support, and could be later invested into improving their infrastructure. This would later on grant access to healthcare and education for the citizens, resulting in a positive cycle and increasing the quality of life for all. As they gain access to education, the citizens would be empowered with knowledge, attracting businessmen from other countries to invest in these countries for the workforce.

It is safe to conclude that the Silk Road is exactly what could help developing nations thrive. It can greatly contribute to promoting their economic development, and participating in the initiative could be what they need to reduce poverty, improve the living standards, and to sustain their growth in the long run, helping them increase their influence on a global scale.

Having sustainable trade routes has always led to a drastic increase in economic development, which is evident from what the original Silk Road had accomplished. The modern Silk Road most likely aims to follow after its footsteps, further building upon its glorious legacy by adapting modernized infrastructure and advanced technology. By using efficient transport methods, they can significantly reduce the time required for goods to be transported from Asia to other continents, securing the supply chain and allowing for a more reliable trading method for everyone involved.

Just as how it was centuries ago, we as a society were greatly impacted by COVID-19. But as humans adapt and learn from past mistakes, unlike the previous Silk Road, where it worsened the situation, this time the Silk Road has been used to efficiently transport medical aid right away to other countries. When trade merchants had to travel for days or weeks to transport goods, the government can now do so as soon as the demand arises without delay. Many countries that received help were also participants in the initiative, once again highlighting how this can benefit people globally.

In order for the new Silk Road to flourish, infrastructure must be secure for the countries, hence China would partner with many developing countries in the initiative to build infrastructure by investing a large amount of money and aiding in construction. If infrastructure is lacking in any country, the communication and transport chain may be broken and the initiative would not be as effective. By doing so, China actually provides the developing countries a mutually beneficial offer where their economies can be updated and modernized, whereas China could spread their influence to those countries and take this chance to forge alliances or to gain a secure supply chain for resources.

Now, for China, of course it would receive many benefits, whether it be in the aspect of forming good relationships, or for its economy. By aiding so many countries and having them all interlinked, Chinese companies could take the chance to expand their business overseas to engage in a wider audience. By doing so, more talented people would yet again be attracted to China, ultimately giving back to the economy and creating a wider sense of diversity in the society.

The new Silk Road really isn't just an imitation of that from the past, it's enriched with modernized cultures and technology, and we have learned from historical events. COVID-19 showcased exactly that. No longer do we have to spend days in order to receive or send aid, we have much better alternatives, and for now, they would be nothing but beneficial to our society. At the end of the day, this initiative isn't just solely to focus on the monetary benefits, its also a way to connect people from different countries to introduce people to different unique cultures. By increasing the ways for people with rich and diverse backgrounds to interact and to share their own unique ideas and perspectives, it allows for individuals to have a richer knowledge and to expand their worldviews. In an era where people are filled with so much judgement and hate, what we really needed was an opportunity. And this was exactly what could bridge the gap between us.

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

*Victoria Shanghai Academy, Pieter Mahmoud Van Olphen, 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 km<sup>2</sup>, 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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# Cohesion through Connection – The Silk Road’s Political Legacy

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## Introduction

Trade – the buying and selling of goods – has always been a fundamental catalyst for the advancement of mankind. From the simple bartering of foods and stones in prehistoric times to the vast trade networks of the present day, it is evident that this exchange is crucial to the survival and improvement of humanity as a species. In order to promote trade, our predecessors have set up various networks across the globe, linking not just nations, but continents together with routes over land and sea. One of the most prominent trade networks in history is none other than the Silk Road. Established by the ancient Chinese in around 130 BCE, this system of routes connected large portions of Europe and Asia, stretching from Chang’an to Rome. These routes were used for over a millennium, with the fall of Constantinople marking its decline in the 15th century. Then, how did the Silk Road come into existence, then prosperity, and finally meet its decline? This essay argues that the political cohesion of empires was a primary factor to the rise and fall of the Silk Road – flourishing during strong, centralized reigns such as the Han and Tang, fragmenting under periods of instability, and ultimately being superseded by maritime alternatives when overland security collapsed.

## The Han Dynasty: Initiation

The development of the Silk Road was initiated mainly through exploration and military conquest during the Han dynasty, with the most famous example being Zhang Qian’s missions. He was dispatched in 138 BCE by the Han court to form an alliance with the Yuezhi, located in modern Tajikistan, against the Xiongnu tribes in modern Inner Mongolia. Zhang returned in 125 BCE, a whole 13 years later, without the alliance. However, he did return with detailed information about other well-developed civilizations to the West, such as Anxi (Parthia), Shendu (India), and Taozhi (Mesopotamia). Although Zhang did not form any commercial relations directly, he did open opportunities for future merchants to establish trade routes in the future. For this reason, Zhang is known as the ‘Father of the Silk Road’. Another reason the Silk Road was made possible was the expansion of the Han dynasty. Numerous conquests were made during this period to form the Protectorate of Western Regions, namely the War of Heavenly Horses and the Han–Xiongnu War. These conquests led to the pacification of the Hexi Corridor, securing control over major trade routes to Central Asia. The Hexi Corridor is widely considered the beginning of the Silk Road by most scholars for this reason.

Even with the Han dynasty’s huge achievements, it is worth noting that China was not the only contributor to the early development of the Silk Road. One significant contributor was the Roman Empire with the conquest of Egypt giving the Romans control over maritime routes to India, allowing regular communication and trade between China, India, Africa and Europe on a much larger scale. Through such conquests, the Romans were able to inherit trade routes from the Arabs and Hellenistic powers that were part of the Silk Road, thus connecting the West to the East through these routes.

So, what drove the Chinese and other nations to initiate these trade routes in the first place? To answer this question, we look at the term itself: the ‘Silk Road’.

The term ‘Silk Road’ stems from the trade of silk textiles, which were mainly produced in China. Chinese silk was especially popular in the Roman Empire for its comfort and beauty in clothing, with so much silk exported to Rome that the Roman Senate had to issue edicts due to an excessive outflow of gold. The trade of silk can also be seen in other nations, such as India and Greece. This not only boosted Chinese wealth, but also transformed silk from a local product to a global treasure, proving the significance of the Silk Road even during its early periods.

Moreover, not only silk was traded in the early days of the Silk Road. Apart from luxury goods such as jade and spices, horses were also imported, which were named ‘heavenly horses’ by the Chinese. Technologies were also exchanged between the West and the East, with glassmaking technology from Rome and the Mediterranean coming into China.

### Post-Han to Northern and Southern Dynasties: Instability

Following the fall of the Han dynasty in 220CE (henceforth), China experienced a prolonged period of political shifts, greatly affecting trade routes and the stability of the Silk Road. However, the Silk Road did not collapse due to this cause. Trade continued, mainly managed by merchants in Central Asia, but was also present in China and Europe during this period. How did merchants sustain trade during this period of instability, and what was traded despite these difficulties?

Instead of relying on Chinese authorities to maintain routes, trade became much more fragmented, with Sogdian merchants – an ancient Iranian people located in present day Uzbekistan and Tajikistan – becoming the main intermediaries to trade. Some of the merchants knew foreign languages, thus acting as translators and interpreters.

However, trade on the Silk Road still proved difficult due to ongoing conflicts and political fragmentation. To circumvent these obstacles, merchants used alternative trade routes to continue trade. For instance, the Silk Road was split into northern and southern routes. In particular, auxiliary routes such as the Qinghai Road, as well as maritime routes collectively known as the Maritime Silk Road flourished, especially during the Northern and Southern dynasties.

Despite the many difficulties merchants faced traversing China, this period has seen an unprecedented spread in culture, with the Sogdians and Indians playing a pivotal role. The Sogdians were multicultural as they frequently traded with European and Asian merchants, allowing them to act as cultural mediators, resulting in these cultures extending to areas throughout Asia and Europe. This is exemplified by the introduction of Zoroastrianism into China, with evidence of temples existing in Luoyang and Chang'an during these periods. Buddhism was disseminated rapidly as Indian and Central Asian monks travelled to China through the Silk Road, introducing different scriptures and art. Namely, Kumārajīva, an Indian monk, translated many Buddhist texts, which were originally in Prakrit or Sanskrit, into Chinese, allowing Chinese audiences access to Buddhist philosophy. Chinese monks also travelled to India through the Silk Road to study Buddhism, with Faxian being an example.

The movement of technologies is also evident during the Post-Han period of China. For instance, silk production technology was leaked to the Byzantine Empire and Central Asia when Emperor Justinian sent spies to steal silkworm eggs, ending China's silk monopoly.

### The Sui Dynasty: Revitalization

After the reunification of China in 581, the Sui dynasty, despite only lasting 37 years, was indispensable to the revival of the Silk Road. What factors caused such drastic changes in such a short period of time?

In the early Sui dynasty, political stability allowed merchants to trade more efficiently in China. This stability due to unification meant that trade in China was standardized: Policies, laws, currency etc. Protection was also massively improved during the Sui dynasty through garrisons and troops, allowing merchants to travel more safely across Chinese territory.

Moreover, the Sui dynasty also promoted trade through infrastructure. The construction of the Grand Canal in 604 connected the Yangtze River to the Yellow River, facilitating the movement of goods between southern and northern China. Another important construction was the repair of the Great Wall of China. This greatly improved security along the northern trade routes, protecting merchants from threats such as the Turks.

Apart from stability and infrastructure, the Sui also helped revitalize trade through diplomacy and conquest. Through diplomatic missions to various areas of Asia, the Sui was able to reestablish ties with many states in Central Asia. This made many land routes viable along these regions, re-enabling trade with western territories. Military conquests in the West, such as the confrontations with the Eastern Turks, were also greatly beneficial to the revitalization of the Silk Road. These conquests not only reinforced the Sui's control over strategic areas over trade routes, but also subdued threats by defeating the Eastern Turks, deterring raids and making border regions safer to traverse.

Although the Sui laid the foundation for trade in its early years, the late Sui dynasty showed a decline in the Silk Road yet again. Military overreach, especially the three campaigns against Goguryeo (present-day Korea). These failed invasions significantly drained economic resources that could have gone into trade and diplomacy, costing millions of lives. These losses heavily impacted trade in China. Economic collapse occurred due to heavy taxation and forced labour, causing rebellions to arise across many regions. These uprisings decentralized trade routes as control fell in various crucial areas of the Silk Road, eventually leading to the fall of the Sui dynasty in 618.

#### The Tang Dynasty: Golden Age

The Silk Road was revived and flourished during the Tang dynasty in the 7th century, with international material and cultural exchange at heights never before seen. How did the Tang overcome the decline and unrest in the late Sui dynasty and enter the 'golden age' of the Silk Road?

China's territory expanded much further westwards in the Tang dynasty, restoring major sectors of land. This included the Hexi Corridor, one of the most important passages on the Silk Road. Multiple protectorate states, collectively named the Protectorate General to Pacify the West, were also established. This allowed the Tang to project power far into Central Asia, most notably the Anxi Protectorate and the Sogdiana Protectorate, which were directly on the Silk Road. Centralized control over these regions were vital to the revival of the Silk Road, providing merchants with protection and standardization. The Tang's conquest in the East is also not to be ignored, as the Goguryeo-Tang War eventually led to the establishment of the Unified Silla Kingdom, which was a Tang ally. Additionally, the annexation of Annam (present-day northern Vietnam) helped reinforce maritime trade routes.

The Tang also prioritized trade and diplomacy. Trade relations were present between the Tang and a multitude of foreign countries in Asia and even Europe, such as the Byzantine Empire. This led to people from many different cultures trading or even living in China, greatly accelerating economic growth and cultural exchange in the Tang dynasty.

Infrastructure was also a primary investment of the Tang during the Silk Road's peak. The Tang inherited the Grand Canal from the Sui dynasty, as well as expanding on it to make transportation even easier for merchants trading between northern and southern China. The Tang court also invested in roads and other transportation facilities, making the movement of goods and ideas more efficient.

Due to these reasons, trade was at its highest. Substantial economic exchanges occurred, most notably the trade of silk, porcelain and precious metals. More importantly, however, is the exchange of culture and technology. For instance, papermaking technology was introduced to the Islamic world in the 7th century, which quickly became useful for scientific and literary purposes. The spread of art was also seen, with that of Buddhist art throughout Central and East Asia being the most prominent, although other art cultures like Greek and Indian art also permeated throughout the Silk Road.

#### Post-Tang to the Song Dynasty: Decline

Following the decline of the Tang dynasty, the Silk Road's significance in trade gradually dropped, and maritime trade became the mainstream. The Silk Road fell out of popularity in around 1450, marked by the fall of the Byzantine Empire. What caused this decline, and how was trade changed during this time?

Although the Silk Road was still prosperous in the early-mid Tang dynasty, this was not the case later on. Events such as the An Lushan Rebellion severely affected central control over trade, as civil wars took millions of lives. The Tang dynasty also experienced economic collapse as military expenses and tax skyrocketed, draining resources that originally went into the Silk Road. Further compounding this decline, the Tang court lost its protectorates in Central Asia, greatly reducing China's safeguard on routes over these regions.

Following the Tang's fall was the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms period, which saw another wave of instability in China. The absence of a centralized government meant less protection for merchants and caravans as

well as weaker frontier garrisons. This caused merchants to avoid overland trade, especially on areas of the Silk Road in China as trade became unsafe.

Although China was reunified again in the Song dynasty, no significant resurgence of overland trade occurred. Instead, merchants opted for safer and more cost-efficient maritime routes. This marked a major shift in trade strategies, permanently reducing China's reliance on the Silk Road for trade.

#### The Yuan Dynasty: Final Resurgence

Despite the weakening of the Silk Road after the Tang dynasty, the Mongol Empire, or the Yuan dynasty, briefly revived the Silk Road in the 13th century through Pax Mongolica, a sustained period of international peace. It saw a final, powerful resurgence – trade prospered throughout Eurasia as the Mongols unified nearly the whole of Central Asia as well as parts of eastern Europe.

Overland travel across Asia was made safer and easier than ever before with relay stations named the yam. Founded by Ögedei Khan, these relay stations provided merchants with shelter, food and even spare horses. Moreover, the Yuan exclusively relied on chao. The Mongol Empire was the first empire to utilize paper money as its main currency, making exchange much more convenient and standardized.

During these 97 years of Mongol rule, a variety of goods, such as Chinese paper and Western spices were traded. More essentially, revolutionary Chinese technologies also disseminated throughout the West, including gunpowder and printing technology.

However, this revival was short-lived, as the Mongol Empire eventually faced political fragmentation, the same case after the Han and Tang dynasties.

#### Ming dynasty to the Fall of Constantinople: Termination

After the fall of the Mongol Empire, Chinese territory shrank, cutting off direct trade from China to Europe. Furthermore, the Ming dynasty relied heavily on maritime trade, with the voyages of Zheng He clearly illustrating this shift. These voyages connected China with Southeast Asia, India and even East Africa, accelerating the Silk Road's decline as it fell out of relevance.

At the same time, the Black Death devastated populations as it spread along the Silk Road, heavily disrupting caravan networks and demand for luxury goods.

Finally, in the 1450s, Constantinople fell, and the Ottoman Empire seized control of numerous areas of Europe, including key choke points on the Silk Road. This forced the Europeans to seek and develop new trade routes, ushering in the Age of Discovery and permanently shifted global trade to the seas. The termination of the Silk Road not only marked the end of a millennium-long era of overland trade, but also the initiation of modern global commerce.

#### 2013: Belt and Road Initiative

After a long 500 years, China has revived the Silk Road with the Belt and Road Initiative in 2013. With over 150 participating countries, this is easily one of the most ambitious and large-scale trade projects globally. What efforts are being made, and how will this benefit trade – not just in China, but globally?

The Belt and Road Initiative has seen great success through infrastructure investments. One of the key projects include the China–Europe Railway Express, a vast network of freight trains connecting China with Europe and Asia. It provides a much faster and more cost-effective means of freight transport, linking over 100 Chinese cities with more than 200 European ones. The Gwadar Port in Pakistan is also a flagship project of the Belt and Road Initiative, aiming to transform the port into a major hub linking the Arabian Sea to key areas and cities of Central Asia. Such projects highly benefit global trade by improving connectivity between countries, as well as reducing trade costs.

Apart from infrastructure, the Belt and Road Initiative also focuses on digital development. The Digital Silk Road was announced in 2015, aiming to improve digital and technological development across Asia and Europe. Some examples of developments include the promotion of e-commerce platforms, as well as the integration of mobile e-payment systems in partnering countries, facilitating digital trade in consumer goods.

Sustainability and cooperation is also a key emphasis in the Belt and Road Initiative. This is achieved through the Green BRI, with China and its partners investing in renewable energy sources such as solar farms and wind power. This ensures the environmental responsibility of future trade networks.

Finally, the significance of the BRI extends beyond infrastructure, whether physical or digital. The initiative fosters international cooperation and cohesion across more than 150 nations, echoing the unity of the Silk Road that once sustained empires.

#### Conclusion

From the missions of Zhang Qian in the Han dynasty to the golden age in the Tang dynasty, the Silk Road has always been more than just a way to transport goods – it is a network where cultures were exchanged and technologies were developed – a living artery for our civilization. Today, the Belt and Road Initiative continues its legacy, reimagining the Silk Road into a catalyst of global trade, where high-speed railways and digital networks revolutionize transport and connect countless nations. What began as merchants on caravans carrying silk and spices has transformed into digital commerce platforms and high-speed railways spanning across continents – a testimony to just how far trade has brought us. The Belt and Road Initiative has proven that the Silk Road is not confined to the past, but that its spirit of exchange and connection will continue to make humankind flourish.



Creative Writing  
**Non-Fiction**

Group 4

# Pioneering the Road of Aspirations — the Long and Arduous Journey

*G.T. (Ellen Yeung) College, Lee, Sze Ngai Jasper – 17*

Since the birth of the Chinese civilization, the Huaxia people established their homeland in the Central Plains — Zhongyuan. Their curious nature made them explore the unknown outside the borders. Their courage led them to become the victors against the Siyi tribes surrounding them. Their wisdom allowed them to integrate nearby nations and rule the land properly. After centuries of exploration and expansion, the nation went through inner power struggles and civil wars. The first unified China appeared after Qin Shi Huang vanquished all other states, but the nation was weakened after hundreds of conflicts and stopped its exploration. A Great Wall was constructed, blocking intruders' entrance, but also limiting the Chinese people's vision towards the outer world. Ironically soon after the construction of the Great Wall, the Qin dynasty collapsed, leading another civil war behind the walls.

The Han Dynasty, formed after Liu Bang's triumph, tentatively united China once again after the Chu–Han contention. The emperor began reviving the country's social stability and economy through reforms. However, the northern nomads, raiding villages and besieging Han cities on their borders with Han, continued to pose a devastating threat, terrorizing civilians of the nation. “Xiongnu”, also regarded as the Huns or the “Scourge of God” by Europe centuries later under Attila's rule, frequently executed aggressions against the south while occupying Chinese territory.

According to the book of Han, The dynasty's founder was defeated and nearly encircled by Hunnic cavalry while trying to drive out the invaders (Battle of Baideng). Furthermore, the newly established Han government was unprepared for major wars, leading to a defensive stalemate that lasted decades. Xiongnu blocked all communication of Han with northwestern states, forming an invisible barrier that blocked Han influence near the Yellow River. Emperor Gao Zu — Liu Bang placed his expectations on his successors, hoping his children would end the humiliation.

After the Wen–Jing Era of Han, the dynasty achieved its golden age. With an abundance of food and wealth in the national treasury, Liu Bang's great grandson (Emperor Wu of Han) aspired to secure the north, making contacts with friendly nations nearby, expanding Han's control on the continent and reaching the peak territory of the dynasty. Armaments were prepared, generals were carefully picked, but campaigns into the far north were still risky as communication and logistics were difficult in those days.

An alliance with a neighbouring state would be helpful, especially when one of them had already asked for it before. Da Yuezhi expressed its willingness to ally with Han. The emperor appreciated the request and decided to send an envoy to confirm the diplomatic statement. However, the route towards Yuezhi takes months or even years to finish. Besides, it is under Xiongnu's control. Could anyone complete this mission at all?

Most courtiers feared joining this risky trip. Long time traveling in deserts, arduous conditions daunting travelers. When officers from both the civic and the military sectors remained silent, a brave man Zhang Qian stepped forward and recommended himself to lead the diplomatic envoy. The emperor questioned the young officer: “Do you consider yourself qualified for the position?” “My experience fighting with Xiongnu would help the team navigate the route accurately.” Zhang replied. Since this resume seems to meet the requirements and his volunteering is courageous, the emperor placed high hopes on him. Gan Fu, a Hunnic Han official joined Zhang as an interpreter and a hundred soldiers were rallied, forming the envoy and starting from the Han's capital Chang'an, began their epic journey.

Around the year 138 BC (from Shiji records, also known as the Records of the Grand Historian), the crew left the land of Han, crossing the Hexi Corridor to continue their journey. With water supplies on low and a large temperature range, the envoy struggled to travel west. First came the Qilian Mountains, then some plains in the middle, and finally the plateau at north. Although some oases there and the Ejin River did save the men from dehydration, the scorching environment lowered their morale, the silent nights with wicked winds made them fear possible assaults from the Huns, the long routes caused homesickness within these people.

When they were in the middle of the corridor, some signs left by Hunnic horsemen were seen. Gan Fu halted and said: “Here is the bottleneck of our road. Xiongnu people probably garrisoned this site before our arrival.” Zhang Qian replied he had noted this information and told the crew to leave this place as fast as possible. However, Gan Fu stopped Zhang and continued to speak. “Passing this place must be risky. I doubt any attempts could let us go on further. I am sure there already are some cities near us now. Shouldn’t we just make contact with them? This may bring results good enough for us to return...”

Zhang interrupted his words. “Our goal is not only to reach the West Regions finding allies, but also to explore the area and ensure our alliance with Da Yuezhi. We have been blocked by the nomads for centuries. We cannot return and call that a day.” Gan Fu sighed and agreed to continue. “I don’t want to face my barbaric compatriots.” He muttered.

Unfortunately, their nightmare struck them soon after they resumed their journey. Some Hunnic scouts found them and rallied thousands of horsemen to surround the envoy. The hundred Han people in the pocket had no chances to fight back, capture became their fate. Zhang Qian and Gan Fu were brought to the Chanyu’s (leader of the Huns) tent, interrogating their reason to pass there.

Some people of the envoy suggested that lying, telling Xiongnu they are just merchants passing the region is better than telling the truth. Zhang had other thoughts and he chose to admit they are a diplomatic envoy. “Interesting, at first I want to rob and kill you all, but it seems like you guys might be even useful as a bargaining chip.” The Chanyu then captured them in cells. They could only hope one day their emperor would rescue them out.

The Chanyu found Zhang to be a great person and wanted to make him stay. He gave Zhang luxuries, better living conditions and even granted him a wife. It was Zhang’s first time to have such an opportunity to gain such wealth and status, also a gorgeous wife entering his life. Zhang nearly sank to his desires those days, but in his mind he still wants to walk beyond where his ancestors had gone. Zhang refused all the benefits, returned to his initial cell.

Gan Fu and most of the crew felt depressed and prayed for permits to leave; most kept being pessimistic in the prison. Zhang had his deepest ambitions and thought of ways to escape. Year after year passed, the envoy was still wandering with the Chanyu’s clan. Sometimes Zhang dreams of his past during the long nights, reminding himself why he had brought himself here.

As a veteran of the northern border, Zhang Qian fought several wars and many battles. The Huns were never satisfied by their loot, their victories, their invasive acts. Sometimes some small states from the Western Regions (Central Asia) were visited by Zhang. They have cultures different from Han, having different goods and resources which could be traded, curious of the Han Dynasty but blocked by the tyranny of Xiongnu, not being able to communicate with the dragon from the east. Zhang is not an ordinary officer; his adventurous mind drove him to join the envoy. “What’s beyond Xiongnu’s borders?” “Are there other nations we could contact?” “Could we step over the Great Wall and explore the world more?” These thoughts filled in the explorer’s soul.

After around a decade, the emperor started a war with Xiongnu, which caused a lot of guards near Zhang Qian’s envoy to go to the frontier. Zhang noticed the movement of the Huns and claimed this as their golden opportunity. One night, when the battle met its peak, the remaining members of the envoy broke free. Zhang was surprised when his wife followed him rather than staying with her Hunnic family. They cheered, they cried in happiness, they embraced freedom once again. Zhang then questioned himself, should we return home as soon as possible or should we accomplish our goal? He knew that, for the sake of his own dream and to avoid returning to the emperor empty-handed, he must continue.

The envoy noticed the Yuezhi people immigrated west, so they first arrived in a smaller state —Dayuan to gain some supplies first. The king of Dayuan welcomed the envoy and showed interest in making an alliance with Han. Zhang promised him Han would give him some gold if he arrived at Tokhara successfully; the king then transferred the envoy to their destination.

When Zhang finally reached the possible ally, he found the Tokhara abandoned thoughts to fight back Xiongnu. Their casualties wore down their courage. Their current position away from Xiongnu made them feel comfortable about their current status. The Yuezhi people were at peace with the Huns during Zhang’s capture and changed their mind. The alliance request they sent before was declared as invalid. Zhang saw this as a betrayal and thought: “Why appease the devils when you could have defeated them?” Zhang gave out offers and promises to the king,

but the king refused further negotiations. Zhang kept trying to persuade but nothing changed. He then decided to return to Han after a year of stay.

Zhang and Gan Fu met other countries when returning to Han. The Yarkant, the Khotan, the Loulan had many items which the two Han officials had never seen before. Grapes and wine formed by it, alfalfa for horse feed were bought by them and changed Chinese agriculture from then on.

Unluckily, another Xiongnu capture appeared during their return. Zhang was once again brought to the Chanyu's tent. One year later, the Huns had a civil war going on, Zhang and Gan Fu quickly returned to Chang'an with their crew, returning to their homeland in 126 BC, finishing the 12–13 years long journey, passing through badlands and meeting people from different parts of the continent.

The emperor was grateful that they returned to Han's territory. Emperor Wu was amazed by the records Zhang told him, curious of what's behind the grassland ruled by the Huns. Emperor Wu forgave Zhang's failure in not forming an alliance with Da Yuezhi, later on promoting him for all the information and goods he brought back from the Western Region. The maps, weather patterns and tradable goods recorded down allowed the emperor to prepare campaigns with more accurate information; commercial caravans could know which items to exchange with different states, benefiting Han's people.

Zhang not only helped secure the north by his words, but also by blood and iron. He went back to his duties as a military officer and fought in wars between Han and the Xiongnu. He followed the great general Wei Qing and gained his nobility after his triumph, then lost it soon after another battle with Li Guang.

Later on in 121 BC, legendary commander Huo Qubing encountered and conquered several Xiongnu clans near today's Gansu, shattering Xiongnu's power in the Hexi Corridor. Huo Qubing nearly cleared all the Hunnic cavalry there but some forces managed to escape. As the Huns were trying to regain strength by controlling the Northwest, Shiji recorded that Zhang Qian once again went to the Western Regions two years later, attempting to form a coalition to remove all Xiongnu influence near Han, also to reopen the route which allows communication with states in the west. His wish to discover more corners of the region was fulfilled.

Zhang Qian met more nations and discovered more trade routes with them. Besides, he brought one diplomat from Wusun back to Han. The Wusun people that are near Xiongnu's territory had some tendencies to join Han's side. Their diplomat was then shocked by Han's strength and culture, and brought this information home, soon the Wusun king suggested forming an alliance with Han. The emperor accepted a marriage alliance with Wusun and gained a crucial ally, ensuring trades with the west easily, and expelled the main Hunnic forces from the Chinese frontier. The Xiongnu were never able to start major assaults towards their south anymore.

Soon after Zhang Qian accomplished his mission, laying on bed sick as his health conditions worsened during his explorations, he met his final destiny —death. The great explorer died 50 years old. His good name is still remembered by the Western Regions and his successors still used his nobility title to meet the states on the Silk Road. His noble spirit remains.

The Silk Road had its prototype after Zhang's effort. Silk, porcelain and tea were exported from Han, spices, jewelry, horses, medicine and even music instruments were imported from the west. Many cultures exchanged thoughts with each other, many lives were able to communicate with each other at peace.

The human nature to explore the unknown made the traveler drift into the unknown, courage made him continue his path, wisdom helped him to avoid a lethal threat. Liang Qichao, a late modern period intellectual, referred to him as 'The Founder of World History'. Zhang Qian's journey is continued by the Tang dynasty and modern China, nations of the world are connected by the 6400 km long road, changing civilizations' development forever.

# Threads of Exchange: Unveiling China's Cultural Tapestry

*G.T. (Ellen Yeung) College, Ng, Hinson – 16*

The Silk Road, an ancient network of trade routes connecting China to the Mediterranean, played a pivotal role in shaping the cultural landscapes of the regions it spanned. While often remembered for facilitating trades in silk, spices, and precious metals, its impact extended far beyond mere commerce. This dynamic network served as a conduit for the exchange of art, religious beliefs, ideas, and innovations, creating a complex web of cultural interactions. The profound influence of the Silk Road on art, religion, language, technology, and literacy continues to resonate in today's interconnected world.

One remarkable aspect of the Silk Road was its ability to facilitate artistic exchanges, as merchants, travelers, and monks transported not just goods but also rich artistic inspirations from their homelands. A compelling example is Buddhist art, which originated in India around the 5th century BCE and featured abstract and symbolic representations of the Buddha. However, as these artistic expressions journeyed through Central Asia and reached China by the 1st century CE, they transformed significantly, with Chinese artisans beginning to depict the Buddha in relatable, humanized forms that incorporated local aesthetics, such as elaborate clothing and compassionate gestures. Statues from the Tang Dynasty (618–907 CE) illustrate this evolution, showcasing the Buddha with serene expressions and intricate details that appealed to Chinese sensibilities. Furthermore, Chinese silk, renowned for its exceptional quality, found its way into Persian markets, where local artisans reinterpreted these textiles; during the Sasanian Empire (224–651 CE), textiles featured intricate patterns, many inspired by Chinese art, including dragons and other mythical creatures. This blending of styles not only enriched the cultural tapestry along the Silk Road but also highlighted how cultural exchange can ignite profound creativity and innovation.

Transitioning from artistic expressions to spiritual beliefs, the Silk Road also served as a significant pathway for religious expression and transformation, facilitating intercultural dialogues among diverse faiths. As traders and travelers traversed expansive landscapes, they carried their beliefs with them, establishing places of worship and fostering communities of faith. Buddhism exemplifies this dynamic interchange; having originated in India, it traversed key cities like Kashgar and Samarkand before flourishing in Chinese urban areas by the 2nd century CE. The incorporation of Buddhist philosophy into Chinese thought influenced not only literature and art but also political ideology, as foundational texts like the "Lotus Sutra" were translated into Chinese, shaping Chinese Buddhism for centuries to come. Additionally, other religions, such as Zoroastrianism and Nestorian Christianity, also found their way along the Silk Road, enriching the spiritual lives of various communities. The Nestorian Christian Church, which originated in the Eastern Roman Empire, established communities across Central Asia, with inscriptions and texts discovered in places like Samarkand dating back to the 8th century—evidence that these exchanges fostered a melting pot of ideas, encouraging dialogue and mutual understanding.

Yet, the spread of these rich religious ideas inevitably illuminated existing literacy divides; many significant texts were available only in specific languages, such as Sanskrit for Buddhist scriptures, thus marginalizing those lacking the literacy required for engaging in spiritual discussions. In response, scholars and monks acted as intermediaries, translating texts for broader audiences and influencing both knowledge accessibility and power dynamics within spiritual communities. Consequently, the diverse interactions along the Silk Road fostered a multilingual environment that facilitated considerable cultural engagement, allowing for the sharing of ideas and stories across cultures.

Such naturally leads to the literary exchanges that further illustrate the Silk Road's role in weaving a multifaceted cultural fabric. Interactions among the diverse peoples along the Silk Road fostered the exchange of language and literature. Between the 2nd and 5th centuries CE, significant Buddhist scriptures were translated from Sanskrit into Chinese; well-known texts like the "Heart Sutra" became foundational, influencing generations of Chinese scholars and practitioners who seamlessly integrated these ideas with Confucian and Daoist philosophies. Moreover, the influence of Persian poetry traveled along these routes, as the works of renowned poets like Rumi and Omar Khayyam reached distant regions, including China, where Rumi's spiritual themes resonated deeply with the Chinese understanding of nature and compassion. Despite this vibrant exchange, however, literary

power often remained concentrated in the hands of the educated elite, as reading and writing were not universally accessible, leading to divides in knowledge. While elite scholars engaged deeply with literary works, the illiterate majority connected through oral traditions, thereby reflecting how access to literature shaped societal norms along the Silk Road.

Shifting focus from the written word to technological developments, the Silk Road also acted as a crucial conduit for technological transfer and innovation, significantly advancing the societies it connected. Various technologies, such as papermaking, the compass, and agricultural techniques, traveled these routes, reshaping daily life. The invention of papermaking in China around the 2nd century CE was particularly transformative, leading to its introduction in the Islamic world and eventually to Europe, thereby revolutionizing record-keeping, literature, and education. By the 8th century, paper became widely utilized during the Islamic Golden Age, leading to remarkable advancements in science and philosophy, as evident in the works of scholars like Al-Khwarizmi and Ibn Sina. Nevertheless, the proliferation of such technologies also highlighted existing literacy divides, as the ability to utilize tools—the printing press that emerged in the 15th century, for instance—was often confined to the educated class, effectively excluding the illiterate from participating in the intellectual and cultural transformations resulting from these innovations.

As literacy became increasingly vital for accessing technical knowledge, the role of education emerged as a key tool for empowerment, underscoring the idea that literacy not only connects individuals to cultural advancements but also equips them to engage actively in practical improvements. In reflecting on the cultural exchanges facilitated by the Silk Road, one cannot ignore the enduring legacy it has left on our world; the interconnectedness that defines today's global society is a testament to this cultural exchange. The blending of artistic styles, faiths, and technological innovations continues to shape our understanding of culture and identity, reminding us of our shared heritage.

Ultimately, by engaging with reflections on literacy, art, technology, and spirituality, one recognizes the importance of inclusivity and mutual respect; the lessons extracted from the Silk Road assert that cultural exchange flourishes when all voices are heard, especially those historically marginalized by literacy divides. As we navigate our complex world, the stories and exchanges of the Silk Road serve as powerful reminders of the potential for collaboration, inspiring us to recognize the unity inherent in cultural exchanges while encouraging connections across diverse backgrounds. In conclusion, the Silk Road represented much more than a mere trade route; it was a vibrant tapestry of cultural exchange that transformed civilizations. Through the intertwined exchanges of art, religion, language, and technology, societies along these routes enriched one another, leaving a profound legacy in history. The interplay of literacy divides within this exchange illustrates the challenges and opportunities that arise when cultures interact. Engaging with the increasingly globalized society of today, the lessons of China's Silk Road remind us of the enduring value of dialogue and collaboration, urging us to embrace our shared humanity and the diversity that enriches our world.

# China's Silk Road – The Unchanging Essence of Connection

*HD Beijing School, Chen, Lu Yan – 15*

Over 2,200 years ago, groups of explorers traveled through the Gobi Desert to the west. They created the famous ancient Silk Road. When I imagine their images and sounds in the sand, I am amazed by their great courage and strong belief. They had created not just a trade route from Chang'an to Rome, but also bonds between people in the East and West. As time elapsed rapidly, everything changes dramatically. However, China's Silk Road has always been there steadily. Its importance has not diminished over time; rather, it has shone more brightly through history.

The ancient Silk Road included not only land routes but also maritime routes, which were important links of trade and cultural exchange between Europe and Asia, since the second century BC to the fifteenth century AD. The land route started from Chang'an, now known as Xi'an, had three major lines. The most important line is the Desert Oasis Line which stretched over 3,500 km and connected major cities across the deserts. The sea routes also showed people's eagerness to explore. The ships sailed eastward to Korea and Japan, and westward across the South China Sea and Indian Ocean to West Asia and Africa, turning oceans into bridges, instead of boundaries.

At its peak during the Tang Dynasty, over two million bolts of silk was exported per year through this route and roughly 60 percent went to the West. I can fancy myself the delight of west merchants when they exchanged their goods for silk from China. Another important goods is Spices, In the Song Dynasty, it made up one-third of its trade. A Song ship that sank in Quanzhou Bay had more than 2,350 jin of spices. These numbers do not just show the volume of trade, but also how eager people from different places wanted to share their goods. During the Yuan Dynasty, Quanzhou Port was a key point on the maritime Silk Road, moving 100,000 metric tons of goods each year, among which silk and ceramics accounted for more than 60% of exports.

Except for trade, Silk Road was also a link of culture between East and West. Buddhism and Islam flowed to the East along this way, and more than 100,000 Buddhist scripts were discovered in Dunhuang. The Qiuci murals and Dunhuang's apsaras paintings mixed Chinese and Western designs. This shows clearly that cultures not only live side by side, but also form something new when they meet. I think the the biggest legacy of the Silk Road is the combination of religions, arts and culture. It proves that differences are not enemies, they are opportunities to create.

The Silk Road has extended from long ago into today, much like a continuous legend throughout China's history. It remains important, and evolves into its 21st-century modern version: the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The BRI, has become the biggest platform for global cooperation in the world, with more than 150 nations, as well as 30 international institutions participating. Currently, China-Europe trains transport goods across lands in about 12-15 days, much quicker than the months required in ancient times. the Internet and 5G networks link countries via e-Commerce. Although BRI outpaces the old Silk Road in size and speed, it remains faithful to its fundamental spirit of connectivity and mutual benefit, not just business deals.

In the future, I am sure that the Silk Road would connect more and more countries. It makes me feel happy that it can convey not only goods, but also friendship and bravery. It's spirit of sharing and cooperation will shine forever, lighting our path to a better future together. To me, the Silk Road is not a road —it's a blessing which gives us hope and leads us to a brightening future.

# The Impact of the Silk Road on E-Commerce Today]

*HD Beijing School, Jiao, Eric – 16*

More than thousands years ago, our ancient Chinese merchants traveled across deserts and steep mountains to sell merchandises like silk, spices and many artifacts from China to people in distant countries. These ancient routes are know as Silk Road that not only carry products, but also fosters the communication between East and West. For centuries, it was the most important trade route worldwide, despite being cut down for several times because of wars.

In 2013, China brought this old route back to life, which is called the New Silk Road nowadays. Until today, this modern version connects over 150 countries through railways, airports, roads and even internet worldwide. One of the biggest changes is the entry of e-commerce. Thanks to better logistic system and digital networks, online shopping platforms like Alibaba or Temu can now reach millions fo new customers across continents. I will explore how the New Silk Road has helped modern e-commerce grow and open the fresh stories of global connection.

Long long ago, the ancient Silk Road was more than just a path for trading silk. Merchants from China carried tea, porcelain and paper to Europe and Middle east, while they brought back glass, high-quality horses and new foods like grapes or carrots. This exchange business lasted for centuries and helped different cultures learn from each other. For instance, Buddhism spread to China through these routes, and our inventions like black powder reached the West, which layered the groundwork for their gun development.

But by the 1400s, sea routes gradually become the tendency because they were cheaper and safer. Consequently, the land Silk route slowly disappeared since its instability from geographical conflict.

2013 is a turning point that indicates a revolution, China started the Belt and Road Initiative to bring back this idea in a modern way. China not only built countless railways, highways in more than 150 countries, but also the Digital Silk Road, laying undersea cables and building 5G networks. These improvements make trade faster and more accessible today, just like how the old one connected different culture and people in the history. Now, instead of camels carrying goods as slow as turtle, trains and internet help businesses reach customers worldwide both efficiently and quickly.

To be more specific, one big way that the New Silk Road helps e-commerce is through mature infrastructure for delivering goods. For example, the China-Europe Railway Express, which is also called China-Europe freight trains, runs regularly between cities in China and Europe. These trains take about 12 to 18 days to deliver packages, much faster than ships which can take over a month. Many online sellers use them to send clothes, electronic devices and other items.

Moreover, the Digital Silk Road is more important for online shopping. It involves building high-speed internet, data centers and mobile networks in partner countries. This allows people in remote places like Southeast Asia or Africa to shop online more easily. What we did is setting up e-commerce platforms in these areas, and apps like Lazada or Shopee, which have Chinese investment. Thanks to the platform, small local businesses in those countries can sell their products online too.

Take Shein an example, a fast-fashion brand brand from China. It sells cost-effective fashion clothes worldwide through its app, and railways' help to deliver fast. Similarly, Temu and AliExpress have grown hugely, offering almost everything from toys to home goods at low prices. In countries alone the route, like Pakistan or Thailand, local sellers now export handicrafts or food to China through these ways. People from different cultures discover each others products. A Pakistani buying gadgets made in China, or a Chinese customer grabbing a cup of coffee made from African coffee beans. This is same with ancient exchange, but it is digitized and instant.

However, there are also some challenges. Some worry about too much expenditure for building projects leads to debt, or environmental issues from new roads and factories. Also, data privacy online is important as mroe people shop across borders. But overall, the New Silk Road is making e-commerce more inclusive and fairer, giving opportunities to small shops and young entrepreneurs.

In conclusion, just as the old Silk Road connected the world through trade and stories, the New Silk Road is doing the same today with online shopping. It brings people closer, shares cultures through products and design, and fosters global economies grow together.

# 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 from 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 in 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 those 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.

# How The Silk Road Started — Zhang Qian's Historic Expedition that Altered History

*Kowloon True Light School, Cheung, Nga Ching – 15*

When you are asked about the Silk Road, do you picture long chains of camels moving across the vast desert or do you think of the exchange of goods from different countries? In short, the Silk Road was a network of trade routes that spanned over 6400 km, facilitating the trading of goods and the sharing of ideas between the East and the West. Surprisingly, the Silk Road was not set up by merchants but rather it came from a political expedition. The protagonist that went on this great adventure was Zhang Qian, a diplomat from the Western Han Dynasty.

In the early Western Han Dynasty, the Xiongnu in the north frequently raided the Han borders, which greatly worried Emperor Wu. In order to counter the Xiongnu, he hoped to form an alliance with the Yuezhi, who were also oppressed by the Xiongnu. When Emperor Wu sent out a notice recruiting members to embark on a journey to the western regions. As the route was not an easy one, but rather one filled with danger and unknowns, no one volunteered. In a surprising turn of events, an inconspicuous official named Zhang Qian volunteered. Soon later, he set out from the imperial capital of Chang'an with over a hundred men and a guide named Gan Fu.

They journeyed to the western end of the Great Wall of China and ventured towards the notorious Taklamakan desert, which Zhang Qian was told meant in local dialect "Go into this place and you won't come out alive". Zhang Qian found a way to avoid this danger by travelling between the remote oases that skirted the desert. However, disaster quickly struck as they were captured by the Xiongnu in the Hexi Corridor. From then on, this detention lasted for a staggering ten years. During the decade spent in the northern lands, he was forced to take a Xiongnu wife and even fathered children. The Xiongnu wanted Zhang Qian to forget his mission by starting a new life living among them. Yet, throughout the long days of herding livestock, he never gave up searching for opportunities to escape.

Finally, after ten years, Zhang Qian and Gan Fu seized a moment of lax security and made a bold escape. Remarkably, he didn't flee back to his nearby homeland, but instead they continued westward. They travelled through many countries, eventually meeting with the Yuezhi. Unfortunately, the Great Yuezhi had settled into stable life on their new land and had a blossoming economy. Not wanting to disrupt the peace they had, they declined to work with Han to fight against Xiongnu. On his return journey, when attempting to bypass Xiongnu territory, he was discovered by the Xiongnu and detained for another year. It was the internal strife that broke out within Xiongnu leadership that gave Zhang Qian an opportunity to escape, returning to Chang'an with his wife, children and Gan Fu. Although Zhang Qian's military objective wasn't fulfilled, the expedition that lasted thirteen years brought back detailed geographical information and customs of the western regions, opening a door for the Han Dynasty to the West.

In 119 BC, following Han's victories over the Xiongnu, the Hexi Corridor was incorporated into Han territory. Zhang Qian, 45 at the time, led a much larger mission to the West. Zhang no longer had to be weary of sudden attacks and traps. Zhang's deputies visited Wusun, Dayuan, Kangju and many different countries, bringing them gifts from the Han Empire, forming long-term diplomatic ties. With these relations secured, what were once trails filled with danger had evolved into flourishing trade routes. Chinese silk, lacquerware, iron, and advanced well-drilling technology flowed westward, while Central Asian "Heavenly Horses," grapes, alfalfa, pomegranates, sesame, and even Western painting, and religion flowed eastward. The path that Zhang Qian walked through connected Chang'an to Asia, Europe and Africa.

Looking back, the opening of the Silk Road is full of paradox and inspiration. Zhang Qian's original goal was "war", seeking allies to fight in a battle, but he ended up opening a path for "peace" in trade. If Zhang had chosen comfort in his ten years of captivity, or if he had turned back to Chang'an after his first escape, the improvement of human civilization might have been delayed, countries might never form relations that facilitated the exchange of cultures. We should all draw inspiration from Zhang's courage and daring spirit in facing adversity.

# Marco! Polo!

*Kowloon True Light School, Leung, Mei Sze Mitch – 15*

For centuries, children have played this game in pools worldwide. One, blindfolded, calls out “Marco!” The others, scattering, answer “Polo!” to search for the person. It is a game of connection through sound, of navigating towards distant voices. It is, in its simplicity, the perfect metaphor for the greatest real-world game ever played: the Silk Road. For over two thousand years, the call of curiosity and commerce echoed across deserts and mountains. Voices from one civilization called out into the unknown, and voices from another, startlingly different, answered back. The game was open to anyone bold enough to play, and its greatest players became legends, threading the world together.

The Silk Road, at its essence, was never a single, paved highway, but a network of overland trails and maritime passages. It was an enormous system connecting the civilizations of Eurasia and Africa. It was less a "road" and more a dynamic conversation conducted over centuries in a hundred languages, where goods were the vocabulary, caravanserais were the punctuation, and trust was the grammar. Its true legacy is not found in the silk that gave it its name, but in the invisible, transformative exchanges: the Buddhist sutra copied in a Dunhuang cave bound for a Korean monastery, the formula for paper passing from a Chinese artisan to a Samarkand scholar, or the strain of a lute melody traveling from Persia to change the sound of Chinese music forever. It was the world's first great experiment in globalization, proving that continents could be woven together not by conquest alone, but by the mutually enriching and relentless human drive to explore, trade, and connect.

In the timeless game of “Marco, Polo,” the first call into the unknown is an act of pure courage. On the stage of world history, that first intentional call was not sounded by a merchant lured by profit, but by an envoy bound by duty: Zhang Qian of the Han Dynasty. In 138 BCE, commissioned by the ambitious Emperor Wu-di, he departed Chang'an on a mission born of strategic desperation, not commercial curiosity. The empire was plagued by the relentless raids of the nomadic Xiongnu confederation from the northern steppes. Chinese defences, reliant on small, pony-like breeds, were crippled. From the west came rumours of a solution—mythical “heavenly horses” from the Ferghana Valley, large and powerful enough to carry armoured warriors. Zhang Qian's task was to find these horses and secure an alliance; his journey would instead forge the world's first transcontinental corridor.

His expedition became an epic saga of endurance that would test the limits of human resolve. Venturing beyond the protective embrace of the Great Wall, Zhang Qian and his company of one hundred men faced the horrors of the Taklamakan Desert, a place whose local name ominously meant, “Go in and you will not come out alive.” Skirting its deadly embrace via remote oases, he then confronted the towering snow-barriers of the Tian Shan mountains. Yet, the greater threat was the Xiongnu themselves. Captured early in his journey, Zhang Qian endured a decade of imprisonment, his official purpose suspended but never forgotten. In a remarkable testament to his determination, he eventually escaped and, rather than turn back to safety, pressed stubbornly westward towards his original goal. After thirteen years of absence, a man presumed dead by his emperor staggered back into Chang'an. Of his hundred companions, only one returned with him.

Zhang Qian's triumph, however, lay not in a diplomatic pact or a herd of heavenly horses, but in the knowledge he carried in his mind. His report to an astonished court was a revelation of wonders that reshaped China's conception of the world. He confirmed the existence of the superb Ferghana steeds, but more importantly, he brought back detailed intelligence on the sophisticated, urbanized civilizations of Central Asia. He spoke of the riches of Persia and the cultural splendour of India, lands previously known only through vague rumour. While occasional traders had undoubtedly traversed these routes before him, Zhang Qian was the first to document them systematically for a state power. As historical accounts note, it was through him that China discovered the potential for structured trade with the West, thereby “laying the foundations for what was eventually to be known as the Silk Route.”

This intelligence became the strategic blueprint for the Han Dynasty's westward expansion. Emperor Wu-di, electrified by Zhang Qian's accounts, transformed exploration into empire. He dispatched a vast army of 60,000

men across the brutal 2,400-kilometre expanse to the Ferghana Valley. This military campaign not only secured the prized breeding horses but also shattered Xiongnu power in the region, bringing the entire Tarim Basin under Chinese control. With the trade routes now pacified and protected, the path was cleared. The first official caravans, laden with bales of precious silk, began their westward journey, returning with not just jade and gems, but with cucumbers, grapes, figs, and ideas that would enrich Chinese civilization.

Thus, what began as a failed diplomatic mission culminated in a foundational act of geographic and economic revolution. Zhang Qian's lonely, persevering call into the western void did more than clear a path; it built a bridge. He transformed a nebulous web of informal trails into a strategic conduit of state power, cultural exchange, and enduring connection. His thirteen-year odyssey proved that the greatest journeys are not always those that achieve their stated aim, but those that return with a new vision of what is possible, forever altering the map of human interaction.

After thirteen years, Zhang Qian returned to Chang'an with a single companion, bringing back more than just confirmation about the horses. He provided the Han court with its first structured intelligence on the sophisticated civilizations to the west, including Persia and India. While traders had likely used the routes before him, Zhang Qian's official report "laid the foundations for what was eventually to be known as the Silk Route." His information directly catalyzed further Han expansion westward. Emperor Wu-di later sent a vast army that secured the Tarim Basin, drove back the Xiongnu, and finally brought the prized Ferghana horses to China, creating the protected corridor that allowed safe passage for the first silk-laden caravans. Thus, Zhang Qian's failed diplomatic mission became a foundational act of exploration, transforming a nebulous network of trails into a strategic conduit for trade, ideas, and power.

To keep that path safe, a general had to shout louder. Ban Chao spent thirty years in the Western Regions, using sheer will and tactical brilliance to secure the treacherous trade routes. He was a stabilizer, ensuring the "Polo" could travel back to Chang'an. So confident was he in the connection that he dispatched his envoy, Gan Ying, on a daring mission: find the legendary Roman Empire (Da Qin). Gan Ying reached the shimmering waters of the Persian Gulf in 97 CE. Some say Persian merchants, fearing the loss of their middleman profits, told him terrifying tales of the sea voyage ahead. He turned back, carrying not Roman goods, but something more valuable: confirmed knowledge. The world was now conceptually linked from the Pacific to the Mediterranean.

Centuries later, the call was not for goods, but for the soul. The monk Xuanzang risked death to travel west in the 7th century Tang Dynasty, defying an imperial ban. His "Marco" was a spiritual one, called out to the birthplace of Buddhism in India. For 17 years, he walked, studied, debated, and collected scriptures. His triumphant return was a "Polo" that reshaped Chinese philosophy, culture, and thought. The road was now a conduit for the mind and spirit.

For a time, the voices across Eurasia grew faint. But the game is versatile. In the 15th century, the "Marco" came from the sea. Admiral Zheng He's colossal treasure fleets, decades before Columbus, sailed to Southeast Asia, India, Arabia, and Africa. He was projecting Ming power, yes, but also exchanging porcelain for giraffes, diplomacy for tribute, and rebuilding a maritime web of contact. He showed that the connection could sail.

And then, the most famous answer of all. Marco Polo, the Venetian merchant, heard the ancient call in reverse. Travelling east in the 13th century, he found a China of staggering wealth and sophistication under the Yuan Dynasty. His written account of his travels, *The Travels of Marco Polo*, was a thunderous "Polo!" shouted back to a Europe he saw as provincial. His book became a geographical treasure map, inspiring generations of explorers to seek the source of this wonder. The cycle was complete: East had called to West, and West had finally, vocally, answered.

The legacy of the Silk Road is not confined to the desert caravans of Central Asia or the great diplomatic missions of antiquity, yet it was a global network whose terminals and cultural impacts stretched from the Mediterranean to the Sea of Japan. At these distant hubs, the ideas and goods borne along the routes were traded, absorbed, and transformed, creating cities that stand today as UNESCO World Heritage sites and powerful

testaments to interconnected history. Venice, Nara, and Hoi An form a compelling triad, representing the western terminus, the eastern reach of ideas, and a vibrant maritime crossroads, that together narrate the full story of exchange.

Rising miraculously from its lagoon on 118 small islands, Venice emerged as the quintessential maritime power and the dynamic western anchor of the Silk Road. Founded by 5th-century refugees fleeing barbarian raids, its destiny was irrevocably shaped by the sea. From a cluster of humble settlements, it grew into a maritime empire. By 1112 AD, it had established a trading market in the Levantine port of Sidon, directly plugging into the Silk Road's Mediterranean endpoints. Its pivotal role was sealed in 1204 when, allied with Crusaders, it captured Constantinople. The abundant booty, including the famed bronze horses of St. Mark's, symbolized the monumental transfer of wealth, art, and architectural influence from the Byzantine East. Venice did not merely receive Asian silks and spices; it became a colossal workshop of finance, diplomacy, and craftsmanship where these goods were traded and disseminated throughout Europe. The city's incomparable architectural ensembles, from the Doge's Palace to its grand canals, are direct monuments to the colossal wealth and cosmopolitan spirit generated by its reign as a Silk Road superpower.

Far to the east, the ancient capital of Nara (710–784 AD) illustrates how the Silk Road functioned primarily as a highway for culture, religion, and statecraft. As Japan's first permanent capital, Nara was deliberately fashioned as a centre of imperial and spiritual authority, drawing directly on influences that had traveled the Silk Road from China and Korea. Its historic monuments include Buddhist temples, like the Todai-ji, which houses a colossal bronze Buddha, Shinto shrines, and the remains of the great Imperial Palace. They bear exceptional witness to this profound cultural transfusion. The layout of the palace and the design of the city are outstanding examples of early Asian capital planning, showcasing a deliberate and sophisticated adaptation of continental models. Here, the Silk Road's most enduring exchange is seen not in bales of silk, but in the flowering of Japanese art, architecture, and spiritual life, demonstrating the route's foundational role in shaping national identity.

On the central coast of Vietnam, Hoi An represents the vibrant, human-scale reality of the maritime Silk Road in Southeast Asia. An exceptionally well-preserved example of a 15th to 19th-century trading port, Hoi An was a living crucible of cultural fusion. Its genesis dates to a 2nd-century BC Sa Huynh port, but it flourished from the late 16th century as a premier international harbour. The town's compact landscape of wooden shop-houses, Chinese assembly halls, an iconic Japanese-covered bridge, and Vietnamese temples is a direct material manifestation of this international commerce. Portuguese, Dutch, Chinese, and Japanese traders all maintained quarters here, making it a node where Christianity entered Vietnam and where goods and customs from across Asia were daily exchanged. Its eventual decline due to silting and the rise of nearby Da Nang ironically became its salvation; economic stagnation froze the town in time, preserving a unique and intimate snapshot of a living, multicultural port community whose very architecture tells the story of peaceful cross-cultural coexistence.

The networks forged by these pioneers did not simply fade; they thrived, creating an interlinked world. It remained popular for more than one and a half thousand years, then disappearing in the mid-1400s as shifting empires, the rise of maritime trade, and changing political winds caused the great overland caravans to slow and then cease.

Yet, the idea of that connective corridor, a road linking worlds, never truly vanished from imagination. It was revived in 2013 and quickly became the biggest international trade project in world history, with 150 countries becoming involved. This modern iteration, while built with high-speed rail and fiber-optic cable, answers the same fundamental human call for exchange that echoed from the time of Zhang Qian.

In 2013, China announced the Belt and Road Initiative, the largest infrastructure project in history. This is not a revival of an old game, but its next evolution. It is a new, organized, and monumental round. The call of "Marco" is now the hum of high-speed trains across Kazakhstan, the deep-water berths of Sri Lankan ports, the fiber-optic cables snaking through Southeast Asia. And the "Polo" is the data, goods, students, and innovations streaming back and forth along these new/old corridors.

The players have changed, the technology is unrecognizable, but the fundamental human impulse remains the same. It is the urge to call out into the unknown, to seek a response, to trade not just spices and silk, but ideas and ambitions. The Silk Road was never just a route. It was, and is, the longest-running, most consequential game of “Marco, Polo” the world has ever known. And the game, once again, is thrillingly afoot.

# The Path Beneath Our Feet: From Silk Road to Everyday Streets

*Po Leung Kuk No. 1 W.H. Cheung College, Leung, Yuk Yi – 15*

It is 3:30 in the afternoon. You are seated in a Cha Chaan Teng featured with tiled floors, vintage decor and ceiling fans, slicing a plate of French Toast coated with melt-in-the-mouth butter and honey with a metal knife. Meanwhile, the background music is shifting from an upbeat K-pop song to a soul-healing English ballad. Before long, your cup of milk tea is served. After finishing the meal, you take your phone out for e-payment and head back to your home on foot. Amid the bustling street, you hear merchants chanting that their imported grapes are the sweetest ever and receive a promotional leaflet about Christianity.

This depicts a very small piece of our everyday life – very convenient, brimmed with little things. This comfortability is always taken for granted. However, it is never anything that comes with the flow, but rather the legacy of an arduous journey – starting from the Han Dynasty to the decline of the Ming Dynasty, from Xi'an in China to the Mediterranean Sea – known as the Silk Road.

Around 2100 years ago, a Chinese diplomat and politician named Zhang Qian was commissioned by Emperor Wu of Han to travel to Yuezhi and form an alliance with it in order to defend Xiongnu. Although the plan was a failure, the sagacious official pivoted his aim to navigate possible trade routes. Then, China's silk, ceramics, tea and paper were placed onto horse caravans and camels one after another; passed across endless dunes, plunging ravines and harsh terrains; and passed onto people from all walks of life. They were woven into the stories of foreign empires, upper classes and finally the populace as time passed by. Of course, the caravans and camels were not empty when retrieved, but with boxes of carrots, glassware, and even Buddhism. Not only was this an exchange of goods, but also the intertwining of external and local cultures. Since then, the ancient lives were much more abundant, and the cultural furnace was ignited.

But this is not the end of the story: The ripples of the Silk Road have been amplified. In the 21st century, China officially rolled out the Belt and Road Initiative, a contemporary version of China's Silk Road. What's different is that it now transports goods by sails, by high-speed rails, and by optical fibre.

The Belt and Road Initiative activated the transportation of goods and made infrastructure blend into realities. Just as silk symbolised affluence and exoticism, today's containers carry China's electronics and machinery to the European market, while energy and agricultural products are delivered to the markets just as near as your neighbourhood. Ever wondered why 24-hour durian freshness guarantees are possible? The answer behind the stable supply of Thai delicacy pulses along the China-Laos Railway, which drastically cut the transportation time and costs. Patently, the network is largely democratising goods. Moreover, as one of the chart-topping countries in terms of population, it is critical for China to secure sufficient energy resources. Acknowledging that mere extraction is not a sustainable practice, China imports natural gases from Russia and ties with resource-rich African nations, building a robust and accessible energy grid. Moving beyond two-way exchanges of goods, there is cultural fusion. Take Istanbul Airport as an example: positioned between Europe and Asia, it juxtaposes Chinese engineering expertise with design standards of Western-leaning countries.

Here, the power of countries is mingled and enlarged that could possibly erect amazing buildings.

Thanks to the initiative, miscellaneous cultures are able to permeate the lives of many. Nowadays, technology has evolved in leaps and bounds, fiber-optic cables and 5G networks have been developed. Beneath the cold machines operating endlessly, it is cultural penetration that knows no borders. Nestling on your sofa and tapping into the streaming service app, you can access a list of music from thousands of musicians of various nationalities. Or you could search for videos about the fun facts of European history casually and get bogged by them. You can delve into not only the culture of countries but also an array of ages. Coupled with concrete dedication, the global cultural fluency could be deepened. A prime example is language learning, which empowers the connection of hearts. As publicly deemed, Chinese is one of the most complicated language systems given its logographic nature. Yet, it comes second in the prevalence of usage, with many recognising it as an ethereal language. Without doubt, the Chinese-built Confucius Institutes are playing a significant role in nurturing

foreign talents and encouraging long-term Chinese studies. Transcending textbook knowledge, learners could also be granted opportunities to exchange with local students, creating the perfect synergy. They are cultivated to open new doors with their own hands.

Here, culture merges seamlessly, enabling us to explore the present and the past, the nearest and the furthest.

Now, let's return to the afternoon tea. You are savoring far more than just a toast, but the baking techniques that have travelled all along to the East from the West, the butter coating having sailed from New Zealand to your plate; you are listening far more than just the rhythms and lyrics, but minds that have crossed, culture that has progressed; you are paying far more than just through a digital platform, but the efforts accumulated by crowds, the epiphanies that occurred in moments. Through the ancient Silk Road, grapes appeared in China, Buddhism appeared in the Chinese empire; through the cold-chain logistics and media, grapes appear in modern markets, Christianity appears in front of us.

The Silk Road is not confined to an official path, but in every detail of our daily lives. The coming tales of it are going to be written by you and me. Devote yourself to a language learning programme, share your ideas and be active in applying your knowledge. The roads are right under our feet.

# A Modern Manifestation of Silk Road

*Po Leung Kuk No. 1 W.H. Cheung College, Yiu, Ho Lam Lucas – 15*

Regarding the thriving digital and technological development, the ancient Chinese's Silk Road has morphed into an unprecedented form that possesses stronger robustness and reliability, this modern line of communication among countries is called 'The Belt and Road Initiative', constructed in 2013 by China.

This modern Silk Road is a competent tool that provides a great platform for the trade and culture exchange between nations and thus contributes to various achievements. This article will discuss the future prospects of this combination of past and present.

First and foremost, it can facilitate economic growth via its unparalleled accessibility to other countries. As the time evolves, the modern communication system is completely different from the traditional one. In the past, traders were required to travel all over the world with horses or boats. The hidden dangers and huge time costs make every journey arduous. Traders need to struggle between parents and perks but this dilemma is being overcome with the modern technology. By formulating special economic zones and lowering non-tariff burdens, the new Silk Road significantly decreases the time cost of cross-border transport and trade for member countries. The transfer of traditional industries products such as ceramics to countries consistently is more convenient and cost-friendly nowadays. The culture germs of China's craftsmen, such as 'Qing Hua Ci', a type of blue-and-white porcelains, can be transported overseas and help facilitate the monetary exchange between countries. It promotes joint ventures in sectors like manufacturing and handmade products industries. The hometown of porcelains, Jingdezhen, a city located in Jiangxi. According to the Chinese authorities, over 80% of local craftsmen agree that the new Silk Road has enlarged the exposure of porcelains to other countries and attracted foreigners to purchase porcelain-related products. This phenomenon provides a sustainable source of income for local businesses and thus helps sustain the culture's existence. Furthermore, Institutions like the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and the Silk Road Fund also offer essential project financing, addressing the massive infrastructure funding gap in the changing era.

Apart from the economic factors, this new channel can also strengthen the technology exchange between countries. With the increasing global green awareness, environmental protection becomes more and more vital to humans. For the sake of tackling the ecological challenges, cooperation among nations is critical. As a result, BRI has served as a bridge of communication that allows experts around the globe to collaborate with each other. Meanwhile, China also provides technical assistance and services to other less-developed countries, such as Cambodia. For instance, China cooperates with Sri Lanka and signed a memorandum of understanding on professional development, sharing experiences in areas such as seawater toilet flushing and beach water quality monitoring. With Cambodia and Sri Lanka, China and Hong Kong provided advanced online air and water quality monitoring stations, smart simulation platforms, and marine emissions simulation software to assist these countries in establishing databases and improving their environmental management capabilities. These systems can benefit both parties and spread China's mutual support spirit 'Shared Future' all over the world. Additionally, China promotes the "Green Silk Road," prioritizing investments in renewable energy, from solar to hydropower, and has adopted guidelines to stabilise and ensure the environmental and social risk management of projects. The BRI framework is increasingly used to collaborate on climate change adaptation, biodiversity conservation, and disaster management. This idea can be demonstrated by the long-term cooperation between China and Africa's regions, such as Kiribati and Nigeria. Chinese scientists have been endeavouring to help tackle their climate challenges, such as drought and pest infections.

Last but not least, it can ensure the competitiveness of China as it creates lines of communication between countries. By financing and building salient infrastructure, China gains remarkable strategic influence. This includes securing energy and resource supply routes, such as pipelines from Central Asia and port access in the Indian Ocean. It can provide a sustainable supply of resources and thus facilitate the industries' development in the long run. Therefore, China can allocate more resources than ever to foster countries' overall development and prosperity, such as enhancing the local ecosystem and security systems, which in turns secures a safer environment for folks to live and work. As long as ensuring the basic needs and protection, employees can work in a more

productive way and thus promote business growth. For example, the “Digital Silk Road” promotes Chinese 5G technology, assisting the innovation of smart cities, and e-commerce platforms abroad. It served as a means for China to set global norms in emerging tech sectors and gather cross-border technologies and perspectives. Large-scale international projects can also help strengthen Chinese engineering, logistics, and project management innovations, enhancing the capabilities of Chinese firms in complex global environments.

In a nutshell, the New Silk Road is an invaluable channel for enhancing economic growth, fostering technological communication and increasing China’s competitiveness. Will the new tales of the Silk Road become a more breathtaking legend? The answer remains to be seen.

# From the Ancient Silk Road to Our Shared Future

*Pui Ching Middle School (Macau), Leong, Si Mei – 16*

When my history teacher showed us a map in primary school, I was immediately drawn to the twisting and turning lines that crossed mountains and deserts. It was the ancient Silk Road which connected the capital of Chang'an to the far Eurasia.

The story began more than two thousand years ago when a man named Zhang Qian from the Han Dynasty set out on two long journeys to the Western Regions. He introduced Chinese signature goods such as silk, tea, and porcelain to the countries. These journeys opened the door of China to the outside world. "Is the Silk Road only a trade road?" I raised my hands and asked my teacher. "Good question!" said my teacher. "But the answer is 'NO'. The Silk Road also bridged Eastern and Western cultures." The prosperous time flew by quickly, and in the Tang and Song dynasties, the Maritime Silk Road grew gradually. Whether it was the land route or the maritime route, their advocacy for peaceful, cooperative, open, and learning-oriented principles has never changed.

"But why can't we see the Silk Road today?" "You think about it, kiddo. Yes, it's true. The Silk Road declined and fell away for some historical reason. However, some decades back, our president Xi brought it back into action. Have people heard about the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)?" said the teacher. The whole class was silent and shaking heads as no one had ever been aware of it before. "Never mind. The BRI is a great project that is changing our world every day, affecting you and me. You will see it again when you grow up. Let's go back to the ancient Silk Road." From that day on, the word BRI grew like a seed in my heart. I always think about what it is and how the Silk Road revived and altered the world.

As the days went by, I began to evolve from a primary school girl to a high school teenager. I began to find the answer myself, by going to the library after school, reading news from the official platforms, taking part in relevant activities or competitions, and sharing with friends and teachers. The little seed inside me inspired me to slowly find the answer in daily research. I remember the first book about China's modern history I picked up. It focused on a groundbreaking moment back in 2013 when the idea of the Silk Road was brought back to life. President Xi visited Kazakhstan that September. While he was there giving his speech, he told the world about a new plan called the Silk Road Economic Belt. Only a month later, he was at the Indonesian Parliament where he introduced the second part of the plan, the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road. Together, these two huge projects became what we now call the Belt and Road Initiative, or the BRI.

According to President Xi, the BRI is guided by "extensive consultation, joint contribution, and shared benefits". The members of BRI should work together on connecting policy, infrastructure, trade, finance, and people-to-people bonds in order to bridge the gaps between nations. Substantially, the BRI has moved from concept to practice with dozens of huge and tiny projects. The initiative connects China with the global economy. It supports China's growth, also offering other countries new chances for recovery and development.

The scale of the BRI has been growing since its establishment. Today, it covers about 75 percent of the world's population. More than 150 countries and 30 international organizations have joined. And over half of the global GDP is generated by the BRI participants. The World Bank reports that the BRI increased trade among members by 4.1 percent. It also raised foreign investment by 5 percent. These numbers matter. Real change also appears on the ground. Apart from playing a role in trade, the BRI bridges China and member countries' cooperation. A crucial part of the development of the BRI is advocating for the Major Infrastructure Projects and the Small and Beautiful Projects. They greatly support countries and their residents in making substantial changes.

One of the most impressive Major Infrastructure Projects I have learned about is the China-Lao railway. The whole project started ten years ago. It took five years of construction and finally opened in 2021. It is hard to imagine, but before the project, Laos only had about 3.5 kilometers of railway in the entire country. That really held them back. This limited its regional connectivity and development, not to mention the ability to trade easily with neighboring countries. However, this era has passed as the new railway stretches over 1,035

kilometers. Geographically, the railway links Kunming and Vientiane, the capital city of Laos. By setting various stops in different countries along the way, Laos was able to open up trade and travel.

Before the first train left the platform, the railway had already benefited residents in Laos. During its construction process, the railway created abundant job opportunities for locals. They participated in the construction so that they could earn stable incomes. Moreover, the technical skills learned in the projects enhanced their personal competitiveness for future careers. Data from the Chinese authorities illustrate that by 2025, the railway had transported 72.5 million tons of cargo, and passenger numbers reached 62.5 million.

A professional living in Vientiane whose name is Viengpheng is one of the passengers. He used to be afraid of traveling to northern Laos for work. "Before the railway, I needed to spend eight hours driving back to my hometown, Luang Prabang," he recalled. "Thanks to the railway, it only takes less than two hours to reach my destination now. I'm grateful that I can spend time with my old mother weekly." It helps millions of "Viengphengs" along the track, turning an exhausting trip into a quick ride. This is amazing, as the railway could kill two birds with one stone. It makes transportation convenient to everyone and boosts Laos' international trade and economy. Hence, the railway was named the "Golden Corridor" between China and Southeast Asia.

While large infrastructure projects continue to reshape partner countries, thoughtful Small and Beautiful Projects are making a shift in people's hearts. They focus on basic needs, supporting essential fields such as agriculture, education, water supply, and healthcare.

We all know that water is one of the most necessary natural resources to maintain our lives. Nevertheless, due to lack of rain and geography, water was once scarce on parts of the African continent. "The water we drink normally is quite salty, and it's definitely insufficient, not to mention our inability to use it to plant crops for food," recalled Ottoman. He is a villager living in the desert. In 2022, teams from China were acting like the "timely rain" to mitigate this phenomenon in Egypt. They worked day and night, drilling over 540 extremely deep wells in the desert and building colossal water towers. "Our entire village would like to give the Chinese-well team a sheep. We are so honored to receive your help." Ottoman was watching the construction process, sharing with a reporter. The wells provide clean water which was once impossible to the country. Also, they helped turn dry land into fertile fields, allowing residents to plant.

On the other hand, the BRI attempts to shorten the gap between countries in education worldwide. In 2016, the first overseas LuBan Workshop was launched in Thailand. Currently, there are already more than 30 workshops operating, according to the official website of the LuBan Workshop. They are providing diverse advanced technology teaching programs, such as robotics, artificial intelligence, and rail transit. Additionally, they spread Chinese culture such as Traditional Chinese Medicine to low- and middle-income countries. Statistically, the workshops have trained tens of thousands of students, teaching practical skills and facilitating development. Bozorzoda is one of the students in the LuBan Workshop. "There is so much advanced equipment and many virtual tools in the LuBan Workshop. I am able to learn something that I have never seen before," said Bozorzoda excitedly. The reporter subsequently asked Bozorzoda about his future career plans. "I would like to stick with robotics. After finishing the current program, I'm hoping to continue my studies in China." These programs have turned skills education into a lasting force for shared development.

From the fascinating lines on the map and each vivid story, I ultimately discovered the answer that I had been searching for for years. Just like my history teacher taught me, the ancient Silk Road inherited the spirit of "peaceful, collaborative, inclusive, and mutual learning". The BRI has provided support for various countries and residents. It doesn't merely focus on China's own profit; instead, it offers every participant the opportunity to ride on the railway of high-speed development, providing a chance for all to achieve a better life.

The BRI needs us; the world needs the input of young people. As a youth in the new era, the ball is in our court. What can we do? We can start by cultivating a global vision and an inclusive mindset in order to share authentic Chinese stories. To dedicate ourselves to the development of the two Projects, let's study hard to improve our professional knowledge. Let's get our act together, as various fields will demand our talents!

Hundreds of years have passed. The old camels are gone, replaced by the high-speed railway. From ancient trade routes to modern railways, diverse global projects bear testimony to countless heart-warming stories. These routes are not simply paths; they are demonstrations of people working together, sharing the same vision of a better world. The Silk Road carries a spirit of peace, cooperation, and openness, and the trade route is still very much alive in today's Belt and Road Initiative. As adolescents today, we do not have to cross long desert trails like the ancient explorers once did. Instead, we can use our education and hard work to bridge different cultures and build a better tomorrow.

# 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 caravanserai 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 caravanserai, 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 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.

# The First Journey of the Silk Road: Zhang Qian's Expedition

*Pui Ching Middle School (Macau), Wong, Si Kei – 16*

More than 2,200 years ago, a man named Zhang Qian began his westward journey with the mission of Emperor Wu of Han, which was the official action to make an exploration of Western Regions for the first time. Therefore, Zhang Qian became the first man to open the Silk Road. This journey not only broke through the barriers of time and space, but also promoted the exchange of products and cultures, furthermore laying a solid foundation for the extension of the Silk Road.

Zhang Qian's westward journey didn't start by accident, but was a wise option made by the Western Han Dynasty. At that time, the Xiongnu occupied the Hexi Corridor, which was the biggest threat to the northwestern border. At that time, the iron cavalry of the Xiongnu frequently harassed the border areas, burning down villages and looting properties. The local people were very frightened and fearless. Emperor Wu knew that the Dayeuzhi in the Western Regions bore a deep-seated feud against the Xiongnu, so he aimed to dispatch an envoy mission to form a military alliance with the Dayeuzhi against the Xiongnu, which was exactly the strategic intention behind Zhang Qian's westward expedition. This background deeply clarifies Zhang Qian's identity—he was not just an explorer, but a diplomatic envoy with a national mission.

On the departure day, the officials held a farewell feast for the group, preparing the fine wine and provisions for them. Zhang Qian drank the wine in one gulp and mounted his horse resolutely and led the envoy group westward. At that time, he was totally moved and desired to open a road to connect west and east. After departing from Changan, Zhang Qian first entered the Hexi Corridor. Unfortunately, he was captured by Xiongnu cavalry. They confined Zhang Qian for ten years after learning the purpose of his mission. However, Zhang Qian was so patriotic that he didn't forget his mission. In the 129 BCE, Zhang Qian escaped with his follower and continued his westward journey. What a pity that the Dayeuzhi didn't want to confront the Xiongnu any more because of their peaceful and prosperous life.

Even though his mission was not finished, he still stayed in the Western Regions for over a year, during which he clearly observed the local geography, goods as well as customs. He found that Fergana was famous for its blood-sweating horses, while Bactria had Qiong bamboo. Based on the local people's introduction, he found that these horses had good stamina and could run 1 thousand in a day. He immediately noted down these characteristics in his heart and wanted to introduce them to the Central Plains in the future. From this clue, he suspected that there must be a folk trade route connecting the southwest region to the Western Regions. These insights were brought back to Han Dynasty and were recorded in *Records of the Grand Historian* and *Book of Han*. In 126 BCE, Zhang Qian returned, but was arrested by Xiongnu again. After being captured this time, the Xiongnu tightened their guard on him. However, he didn't give up the hope of escaping, so he secretly observed their internal movements carefully and waited for the right time to escape. After one year, he escaped during internal unrest among the Xiongnu and went back to Changan. This westward expedition lasted for 13 years, which was filled with adventures and hardships.

Even though Zhang Qian's first journey didn't achieve the military purpose, it opened a window for the Han Dynasty to have a better understanding of the Western Regions. Then, in 119 BCE, Emperor Wu dispatched Zhang Qian to the Western Regions once again. At this time, accompanied by 300 men, he carried various goods such as mutton, gold as well as silk to the King of Wusun and sent deputy envoys to Kingdoms such as Fergana, Kangju and Bactria. Upon meeting the King of Wusun, Zhang Qian presented the delicate gifts and demonstrating the strengths and weakness of forming an alliance against the Xiongnu, clearly expressing his hope of achieving cooperation between the two sides. This journey marked the establishment of formal diplomatic relations between the Han Dynasty and the various states in the Western Regions. Following that, the Kingdom of Wusun dispatched envoys to Changan in return and other states began to make a connection with Han Dynasty. According to the record in *Book of Han*, "thereafter, the Western Regions were awed, and many states dispatched envoys to present tributes." From then on, the channel between the Central Plains and the Western Regions was totally opened.

There is no doubt that Zhang Qian's westward journey exerted an enormous influence on our country's development, which can't be evaluated by just a diplomatic mission. He not only brought multiple products from the Western Regions, like grapes and sesame, but also introduced Central Plains technologies, like silk weaving and iron smelting, thereby facilitating the development of the local economy, so as to meet the people's daily needs and improve their sense of happiness and wellbeing. When the local craftsmen began to learn iron smelting techniques, their faces were filled with awe and joy. When farmers sowed the crop seeds brought from the Central

Plains, they were filled with anticipation for a bountiful harvest. Most importantly, this route opened by Zhang Qian became the bond to connect the western and eastern cultures. In the following years, the Han Dynasty built an administrative system to govern the Western Regions.

Nowadays, the Silk Road has transcended the geographical boundaries, becoming the symbol of cultural exchange between the East and the West. Zhang as the first person to initiate the Silk Road Zhang Qian and left behind a wealth of spiritual treasures for us to learn from, including his resilience, bravery and dedication. Looking back to the history more than 2,000 years later, we can still learn from Zhang Qian that the cultural exchange lies in the brave exploration. Only in this way can we instill new vitality into the development of human civilization.

# The Silk Road 2.0: How Digital Platforms Rewrite Ancient Trade

*S.K.H. Tang Shiu Kin Secondary School, Ho, Chung Yan – 16*

22 centuries ago, Chinese merchants trekked westwards to see if they could sell silk to new customers. On the other hand, the Europeans had been trying to explore the mysterious oriental countries. The trip soon developed into a trade route where merchants from Asia and Europe could trade together there. The route was a big success, soon grew into a two-way trade route, joining Europe to China's Chang'an, which became the biggest city in the world. Historians named this route "The Silk Road" afterwards.

From the second century BCE to the mid-15th century, the Silk Road served as a vital nexus of trade and cultural exchange, playing a central role in facilitating economic, cultural, political, and religious interactions between the Eastern and Western worlds. Spanning over 6,400 km (4,000 mi) on land, the Silk Road separated in 4 routes throughout 1000 years of development, Northern route, Southern route, Southwestern route and Maritime route, respectively. All of which were fragmented and high risk, yet merchants were attracted by the potential profit on the foreigners. They travelled in camel caravans or sailed across the turbulent seas. It was even worse when the trip was always along with a combination of environmental hazards, disease, bandits, and political instability.

Possibly because of these reasons, in the mid 1400s, the Silk Road disappeared.

However, the impulse behind the Silk Road never vanished, people are still trading nowadays. There is always a "Silk Road" connecting distant buyers and sellers. What changed were the tools.

With reduced uncertainty and improved logistics, a new Silk Road emerged in the 21st century, The tragedy of the impassable Silk Road is over. Today, the 'Iron Silk Road' links East and West through a \$230 billion Eurasian transport network which is not on roads or in water but built on servers and software. Since the Reform and Opening-up, the Chinese government has been actively dismantling its economic barriers to welcome international trade and investment. The 'Belt and Road Initiative' project in recent years has silently revived the Silk Road not only physically but also online.

Though the new Silk Road has reunited the East and West again, it still has its setbacks. As our daily life have gotten increasingly digitalized, personal data are collected in various ways. Data localization and platform policies can change overnight when privacy may be harmed. Geopolitics also reroutes ships and trains, spiking costs in a more tense international situation. Convenience of de minimis imports also collides with calls in the EU and US for tighter enforcement on safety, taxes, and intellectual property.

Still, the direction is clear. Like the novelty, margin, and human curiosity that caused the Silk Road 2000 years ago, I am sure that we will find a way to rebuild the new Silk Road. The Silk Road did not disappear in the 1400s, it dematerialized, then reassembled as code sitting atop concrete. Its new tales are written in APIs and tracking numbers, but the plot is familiar: connect, trade, adapt.

# The Legend of the Silk Road

*S.K.H. Tang Shiu Kin Secondary School, Lo, Ching Kiu – 15*

The Silk Road of China is a very popular and important part of Chinese history. The Silk Road provided a chance for a few characters to be a big part of Chinese history and modern China, and there was one man who was credited with officially opening the Silk Road on land.

Zhang Qian, a Chinese diplomat, explorer, and politician, was sent to explore and seek allies and trade opportunities by Emperor Wu, the emperor of the Han Dynasty, around 138 BC. Zhang Qian started his quest at Chang'an, which is Xi'an in modern China. His last stop was the Roman Empire, and therefore, he had to travel through Asia, Africa, and Europe. As you can imagine travelling back in the days from Asia to Europe was a very long way, but fortunately, Zhang Qian didn't give up and opened a road for Western countries and Eastern countries to interact and communicate in economic, political and cultural ways. You might also be wondering why the Silk Road is named that way, it's because silk was the most famous item traded from China to the Roman Empire, it was like gold to the Romans.

There should be a few more questions in your head about the Silk Road and I bet one of them is why I should be grateful for that road when it seems like it doesn't provide much to us youths. In fact, the Silk Road provides us with a way to obtain the daily food that we eat nowadays such as potatoes, carrots and peppers. It also provides us with a way to communicate with Western countries for new study opportunities and new job opportunities can show up in the future, increasing our living standard.

Last but not least, it is important to keep in mind that we should be forever grateful for the people who helped us discover the wonders of the lands that we now recognise.

# The Modern Silk Road: Big Plans, Big Problems, and How China is Trying to Fix It

*S.K.H. Tang Shiu Kin Secondary School, Tang, Hoi Fung – 16*

China's modern Silk Road, the Belt and Road Initiative(BRI), is a huge plan to build ports, roads, and railways all over the world. The initiative has been announced for over a decade, yet it has encountered several controversies and serious situations occurring that not only cause a huge impact on China, but also on the countries working with it.

Poor countries are falling for the “debt trap”. According to a Stanford researcher, poorly conceived Chinese projects have created rounds of sovereign debt crises for developing countries. China is the major creditor of poor BRI partner countries such as Pakistan, Angola, Kenya, Ethiopia, and Myanmar, and most of them are guaranteed with sovereign credit. Against the backdrop of the weakening ability of major countries to repay their debts, debt risks are rising, and there are long-term debt sustainability risks. In addition, while China's foreign investment information is not transparent, Chinese enterprises hold excessively large shares of foreign investment projects, and this has become an excuse for the international community and host countries to criticise the BRI as a “debt trap”. When they could no longer pay off the loans, the burden of resolving them fell on international institutions like the IMF. Critics also worry China will take vital resources, like natural gas or ports, from the countries to pay up the debt, like what happened to Sri Lanka's Hambantota Port. This diverts time and resources away from activities that would contribute to the long-term development of many poor countries. Even if China says that's not what happened, the fear is real in many places.

Poor countries do not only face financial troubles, but also environmental impacts. During the extraction in a copper mine in Zambia, a devastating spill of toxic waste caused one of the country's worst ecological disasters. “Companies have a field day when they come here,” Andrew Kombe, a Zambian lawyer who is representing villagers, “They can do whatever they want.” BRI was thought to improve the quality of life of poor developing countries; nonetheless, the copper mine spill has damaged one of the country's most important waterways, the Kafue River, which supplies potable water to about 5 million people, including residents of the capital, Lusaka. About 60% of Zambia's population lives in its river basin and depends upon its waters. “It really just brings out the negligence that some investors actually have when it comes to environmental protection,” environmental engineer Mweene Himwinda told The Associated Press. “They don't seem to have any concern at all, any regard at all. And I think it's really worrying because at the end of the day, we as Zambian people, [it's] the only land we have.” A 2024 survey found 45% of leaders in partner countries cited worse air or water pollution due to infrastructure projects. While the world is trying to fight climate change and protect our planet, people are furious at China for its irresponsible behaviour toward wildlife and the environment of its partner countries.

Besides the economic and environmental threats, countries also have to deal with one-sided and opaque contracts. According to the very same survey mentioned, nearly one-third of surveyed leaders cited poor transparency as a concern. The lack of clarity raises concerns about corruption. A case study conducted in North Africa reviewing the impacts of the BRI on the country. It has shown a trade imbalance favouring China, with almost all companies involved being Chinese companies, and local workers often relegated to low-skill jobs with less pay, benefiting Chinese companies instead of the local economy. According to public reporting, 600 Sri Lankan workers on a CSCEC-led project came forward in 2023 to voice their concerns about wage disparities and poor working conditions. Protests reportedly broke out in Sri Lanka's North Central province and drew attention to their grievances, which included denial of meal breaks, deceptive insurance schemes, and even physical assault. The opaque contracts and financial terms lead to possible corruption and leave promised mutual benefits being questioned.

Facing all the accusations, China does not ignore them and watches the situation exacerbate with folded arms. They've started to change how they do the BRI, but it's a work in progress.

The most obvious is that China is abandoning the “debt trap”. China is pushing for more debt–equity hybrid models and requiring feasibility studies, emphasising debt transparency and sustainability assessments, and shifting towards "sustainable financing" and better project selection. Chinese researchers advocate for better risk–monitoring systems and closer coordination with host countries and multilateral institutions to improve project oversight and financial resilience. Now, China is no longer a high–risk lender; it now focuses on protecting banks by extending "rescue lending" like currency swaps to middle–income countries, like Pakistan, with large loans, ensuring they can keep paying debts. Poorer countries often get grace periods, not new money or deep debt relief.

Apart from tackling the debt issue, China has also started working on the "Green Silk Road", pledged to stop funding new coal plants abroad and promote renewable energy projects. Nevertheless, enforcement in partner countries remains inconsistent due to various reasons.

The modern Silk Road is at a crossroads, and China is definitely making changes to its approach after all the controversies it was accused of. The future of the BRI will depend on whether people really believe these changes are working. Are the projects truly becoming greener and fairer? Will the debt problems get better? The world is watching to see if this giant plan can fix its big problems and really achieve what it promised: to build connections between countries and help developing countries to foster a better quality of living.

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# Between Faith and Fire

*Shanghai High School International Division, Cring, Wyeth – 14*

This is a true story that takes place in 1275 AD on the Silk Road. Two pilgrims set out from Beijing, and they travel west, hoping to reach Jerusalem:

“Our Father, which art in heaven. In Thy compassion, O Lord, our God, strengthen our weakness, that we may administer the holy sacraments which were given for the salvation of our race, Amen.”

The camels trek forward steadily as the sun sets behind barren—brown dunes and the snowy peaks of Zard Kūh. Markos rides ahead, inaudible, and with the faint steps of his camel, crumbling stones slide below into the dune slack, stirring clouds of soft bright dust. I look out west to see a small town, an obscure glow of torchlight.

“Markos.” A face of youth looks back at me, his eyes energetic, and his contours soft and smooth. I point down towards the village below the brown clouds of Zard Kūh.

With the rough steps of hooves, we arrive in this foreign town. I get off my camel and stride forward slowly. I glance around, looking for a welcoming shop, but I see none. Only the side—glances of merchants trading spice with silk, and loading boxes onto their wagons as they hurry east. We arrive at the edge of this desolate place. Filling up our canteens, we start a small fire. The sound of flowing water pleases my ears, and I rest, in silence.

A dark face appears behind the fire, the orange glow of flames brightening his emerald eyes.

“Shoo, shoo, go away you sly little rascal!” Markos shouts as he stands up waving the silhouette of his arms.

As I throw in another branch, the small contours of the child appear for an instant. In a split moment, our eyes meet.

“Markos, why must you scare the poor child, he was merely begging! We must show some compassion, in the name of our lord.” I stare at the stars.

“Bar Sauma, we have no bread. Look,” he points towards the two scrawny camels “Standing bones! God sheds his divine light upon those alive! We deserve to—”

“All greed, all hatred, all sins...originate from the phrase ‘I deserve’. That is what separates a Rabban from the Head of Church. ” I say venomously. Sighing, I stare on, ignoring Markos’ excuses, when a brief blue trace tears the sky in half. “Another flame of an angel... If heaven is guarded with an angel’s great flames, for whom looks after the lonely soul of a pilgrim?” I think to myself.

Suddenly, glowing embers of torches race closer, and as the shouts grow louder, a group of bandits arrive. One large bulk of a man shoves me aside, and points a knife towards Markos. Panicking, he hands out an ecru bag of coins, and the bandits leave.

I glare into the fire, and rub off the sand stuck in my mustache. A long hush is set between us.

“Should we continue to Jerusalem? Wars are waged, and the mongols fight with the Muslims! Those bandits! They, they, they were Mamluk. It must be too—”

“We have spent far too many years on this pilgrimage... I must get to Jerusalem.” He opens his mouth to speak, but no words come out. As he stares into my eyes, I splash water onto the flames, darkness unfolds, and I sleep.

The desert, with her immense sea of solitary sand, fades as we continue west. Passing Baghdad, we travel beside the coast of the Mediterranean Sea.

The dirt trail ahead leads to Acre, the last Christian city of the region. The sound of dark blue waves crashing against the cliffs echo below, and the dry winds of the Mediterranean howl against our ears. I smell spice as caravans, and chariots pass by. They head towards cities along the roads we’ve been on. Pass the green, dry swirls of vineyards, atop the frothy, white crests of the turquoise waves, lies the yellow bricks of Acre’s city towers. I slash at the horse, Christian gates just ahead. I see the white armor and the bright red cross of a catholic soldier; and the gold brick—stone walls, gradually approaching.

We pass through the iron gates. As a stone road replaces the dirt trail, we are greeted with...eerie silence. Strolling through the city, only the ghostly sight of the city’s stillness remains. Women wearing blue tunics with short—fitted garment walk by rushing to the market. Passing through the chaotic plaza, the stone ruins of destroyed city walls, and across the gentle ringing of church bells, we stop.

“Bar Sauma,” Markos nods towards the gate’s direction with a smile “pass these gates, we should see Jerusalem’s holy walls.”

I no longer hide my joy. I stare into his eyes and grin like a fool.

“Yes Markos. Yes. We are almost there... Our lord’s home, my salvation, my faith, my...” I pause with fatigue, my eyelids suddenly feeling heavy.

Sitting on his horse, he gapes at me in confusion, glancing at me top to bottom. He then shakes his head: “Bar Sauma, I am grateful, for having a friend like you.”

I nod politely.

“Markos—”

“Halt!” A catholic soldier stops in front of us with a long spear in his hands. His white robes swooshing with the blowing breeze, the red cross on his chest seem to loom before us.

“Where do you two men travel?”

“We head to Jerusalem.” says Markos.

“Beware, this is the last Christian city of the Latin east. The Mamluks have conquered Jerusalem. Those that leave may not return. Why Jerusalem?”

“We are pilgrims, seeking the word of god.” I say sincerely.

“In dark robes, with Mongol faces?” The visors move up and down.

“Nestorians” he mutters.

His voice drops to a sonorous baritone. “The war wages on. It’s your choice to die or not, churls.” He turns and leaves, rushing to his post.

“Do you want to continue?”

Markos looks at me in determination. “Violence haunts our path, but I have come all this way. We have bread and water, let’s finish it. However, if we are in danger, we leave!”

I nod, ignoring the second part. Whipping our horses, we gallop past the gates, my lost home an arms reach away.

“Bar Sauma, I see her walls.” He points to a mountain in the horizon. I squint my eyes, trying to see the city, but a thick haze of fog is cast upon the land.

We stop now. Setting camp, I sit on the soft-touch of green grass. I hear birds chirping, and the rough wind chiming. Suddenly, like the veil of a bride, the fog is removed by the hands of god. Silence... reticence... The ivory walls of the Holy Land loom atop green hills and shaky rocks. Lit a radiant golden glow by the setting sun, towers, houses, churches, temples stack on top of each other. The city stretches across the horizon. The temple fades to a gold light, as tears form like puddles before my eyes.

“Ohhh! Dear Lord! We are here!”

I pray silently, and for the first time, I notice Markos. Sitting beside his horse, he gently pats the horse’s back. He stares ahead in awe, eyes glinting with joy. The wind plays with his brown hair, and he smiles warmly as if blessed by an angel. I move over next to him, and we gape at the Holy Land in silence, together. The sun sinks behind the orange sea far west, and night, like a giant black cloth is tossed upon the world. We sleep.

“Bar Sauma! Bar Sauma! Wake up! Wake up! Mamluks—” My eyes open through small slits to a trembling Markos, his brown eyes damp and petrified. He shouts and shakes me over and over again. “WE MUST RUN! Quickly! We have to go NOW!” I stand up slowly. Markos is already on his horse, rushing me to get on mine. I begin to climb feebly onto the horse, when I finally awake fully.

“Markos, Markos, Markos!!!” He turns in panic. “Why must we leave now? Jerusal—” He grabs on to the reins of my horse, and whips at his, and we gallop away.

As the horses slow down to a steady pace, I snatch the reins out of his hands. “What is this frenzy?! Jerusalem is behind!”

“Look behind you! Jerusalem is no more! We must go, or death shall take us to God’s final judgment!” I turn to look behind, but we have traveled too far to see the city. I glare back at Markos.

“If God has bid me death, then so be it! God, home, everything lies there!”

The horse turns, and I dash away from Markos, back towards Jerusalem. Through the howling of wind, I hear muted shouts and yells, loud cries of agonizing pain reverberates across the valley. Speeding up, I hear more and more yells. The horse now stops, unwilling to move any further. A man wiggles below my horse. As his arms twitch in unnatural angles, he groans in pain. His helmet is thrust off, and his muddy face covered in blood. It sprays across his dented armor, soaking the earth in a red, sticky pool. As his smashed skull cuts through his skin, he mutters one final prayer, and in the face of death, he takes his last few breaths. Stillness... Through his messy hair, his eyes point towards the skies, dead.

Abyssal dread takes over me, and I whip at the horse repeatedly, and we dash across the piles of bodies. The eyes, the knight’s eyes, they haunt me. His look, the look of acceptance, the peaceful, eternal stare at the stars.

I start to panic, my breathing quickening.

I fall off the horse and it runs off. I crawl behind a tree and cower there. Strong winds sweep across the burning hell of God’s lost city, and the flickers of flame afar spread, from one tree to another. In my confusion, I hear instances of a horse’s stepping hooves somewhere. “They come to kill those that have survived.”

The eyes appear, as if engraved into my mind.

“I gave my entire life to you lord, why must I die today. I’ve traveled across half the world to be a pious pilgrim, to worship your greatness! Why?! Why?! Why Lord?! My life’s only purpose, torn away by the your own hands! O God, I am not ready to die...”

My eyes flood with tears, and my face swells into redness. I think of the eyes of death, the vacant look towards the stars. “I will close my eyes when death takes its toll. O Heavenly Father, I beg of my death to be quick.” The earth seems to shake as the horse’s hooves approach. As they get louder and louder, I give the

world one last stare. The shining stars, the quiet roads, the crackling of burning trees, and my hands, and my clothes.

“I have lived a full life, and I have done much. If I must die, then know that I have lived a meaningful one.”

The horse stops in front of me. A man of darkness steps down and walks toward me. The man’s black shadow hides his face. I shake in fear, my heart racing, and I pray.

“Bar Sauma!? Bar Sauma! Oh it’s really you!” The man runs over to me and gives me a huge hug. “I thought you were dead. Thank the lord you aren’t dead!”

“Mar–Markos? You came back! Why?” I stammer, staring into his brown eyes with my rheumy ones. And I embrace him as well.

“Bar Sauma, I will always come back for you.” Tears roll down my cheek once again, and I do not want to let go of my friend. “We must go now.”

He pulls me to the horse, and helps me get on. We quickly ride away from the battle, back to the direction of Acre. As I look back, I see the great walls of Jerusalem, burnt and ravaged with fire and smoke. The impurities of mankind, besmirching the virtue of God.

We are near Acre, silently staring at the sky of glimmering stars where the smoke has faded. The night is dim with a dark blue glow. The moon a half crescent, the stars, thousands of tiny little dots in the distance, appear and disappear over and over. Small flickers of hope, covered in the foreboding cold glow of the crescent moon. A brief blue trace tears at the sky.

“Ohh damn you treacherous angels! Damn you fate!” I breathe in gasps for air, as I start weeping.

Markos stares at me, his eyes damp, cheeks traced where his tears dried. “Bar Sauma, what’s wrong?” I stay silent.

“Should you not be grateful, that you live on? Jerusalem has been burnt to the grounds, but shouldn’t that make you more pious? That you value the chances you have with god?”

“Markos... I often have this strong sensation that... You see, all my life, I have been seeking wisdom and knowledge, so much that I’ve come to the doorsteps of Jerusalem, only to be rejected there. What, what is the point of my life, this journey, to be alienated by other Christians, to be disregarded by the people we meet? Markos, I want a home, I want something, anything, in my life... The Holy Land should’ve been that...”

“Your life’s purpose, Bar Sauma, you must find yourself, but your home, your family is always with you, here.” He points at my heart. “People will always hate us for what we are, but remember, there are people that love us for the same reason. I am one of them.”

I look into his eyes. Wordless, I hug him.

A shepherd walks by, his few sheep running before him. “You two men look tired and hurt, you must have come from the battle over that way right? Here have some bread. I am lucky to have left there a day early.”

We accept his kind offer, and take big bites of bread. As he walks away, we pray for him silently.

“We should go home.” Says Markos, and I nod in agreement. We look up at the stars, dim but present.

“Goodnight Markos.”

“Goodnight.”



# Non-fiction

Group 5

# The Allure of China's Silk Road

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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 transhipped 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

sybaritism 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 militaristic 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 multicentennial 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, So, Marco – 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 millenia. "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.

# The Silk Road— The Timeless Gateway Connecting East and West

*Immaculate Heart of Mary College, Chu, Ji Hyun – 17*

In yellow sand and desert barrens, travellers lose their way,  
Looking all around—the clouded sky drops low, touching the plain.  
You'd think the earth ends where heaven ends,  
Yet past Anxi, the road stretches further west.

The poet, Cen Shen, who lived during the Tang Dynasty, captured the splendour of the Silk Road in his verses, immortalizing its grandeur as a vital commercial artery connecting East and West. Picture a celestial forge of light spilling over the horizon of the desert, where golden embers bleed through the sands. In the distance, a slow-moving line cuts through the expanse—the silhouette of a caravan of camels moving carefully across the treacherous Taklamakan Desert, one of the most perilous places on Earth. These camels, far from being lost or aimlessly wandering, are on an important mission, carrying precious cargo on their backs. Yes, among their burdens are shimmering silk and exotic spices. However, they also bear something far weightier—ideas, religions, and new ways of thinking. They carry the promise of the future.

For centuries, traders have traversed the deserts and mountains of Asia, weaving a tapestry of cultural exchange that connected the great empire of China in the East to the Roman Empire in the West, linking innumerable lands in between. This was not merely a trade of goods; it was a vibrant exchange of culture and knowledge. The vast interconnectedness established by this network is what we now know as the Silk Road.

## The Nature of the Silk Road

The Silk Road, with its magnificent size and length, was never a single route but rather a dynamic network of many land and sea paths. For over a thousand years, it functioned like the ancient Internet, connecting the world in ways that shaped the history of Europe, Asia, and beyond. Knowledge, beliefs, and technological innovations moved between continents, facilitated by this intricate system of trade.

## Advantages of Trading on the Silk Road

Trading along the Silk Road offered immense advantages for merchants, empires, and the regions involved. Economic prosperity, cultural enrichment, and political strength flourished along these routes. Merchants enjoyed access to high-demand luxury goods that commanded high profits—Chinese silk, a monopoly product, fetched large sums of gold in distant markets such as Rome and the Middle East. Middlemen, like the skilled Sogdian traders, built their wealth through multilingual networks and cultural bridging, often becoming influential figures in foreign courts.

Empires benefited from the taxes levied on caravans, which funded infrastructure, military endeavors, and urban development. Whenever powerful regimes unified the routes—such as during the Han, Tang, or Mongol periods—they reduced risks from banditry, rendering long-distance trade more reliable and efficient. The Silk Road fostered diplomatic relationships, as evidenced by the Han dynasty's efforts to secure trade partners against common enemies.

In China, the Silk Road served as a foundation for economic development and trading prowess. It transformed China into a wealthy powerhouse, with silk exports leading to substantial inflows of gold and silver that enriched the imperial treasury and supported territorial expansion. Farmers paid taxes in silk, and the state controlled its production, effectively turning silk into a tool for economic and diplomatic transactions.

In return, China benefited from the acquisition of superior "heavenly" horses from Central Asia—vital for military strength against nomadic threats. New crops like grapes, alfalfa, and walnuts entered the Chinese agricultural landscape, diversifying both farming and daily life. It was to the great wisdom of our ancestors that the Han and Tang dynasties actively promoted these routes, constructing forts, walls, and colonies to secure safe trade, fostering the growth of cities like Chang'an into cosmopolitan hubs.

## The Good and Bad of the Silk Road

While the Silk Road significantly contributed to the exchange of goods and ideas, it also served as a conduit for negative consequences, such as the spread of diseases and slavery. However, even these darker aspects sometimes resulted in positive outcomes. For instance, when outbreaks occurred, the brilliant traffic network also broadened the knowledge gained by doctors during these crises, improving medical practices for future generations.

Most people associate the Silk Road with silk, and rightly so. Chinese silk was the most renowned product. For centuries, the secret of silk production was known only to the Chinese. Silk is derived from the cocoons of silkworms, cultivated on mulberry trees, through an intricate process of unwinding delicate threads that are then woven into a luxurious fabric. This textile became a symbol of opulence throughout the known world, with monarchs in Europe and the Middle East willing to exchange vast amounts of gold for its richness.

#### Beyond Silk: A Global Marketplace

The Silk Road indeed represented far more than just silk. It served as a global marketplace where various regions showcased their finest products. Traders from the Mediterranean world—encompassing territories like Rome, Greece, and later Byzantium—exported goods that were valuable but rare in the East. They traded in olive oil (used for cooking and lighting), fine wine, exquisite glassware, gold coins, wool cloth, and beautiful jewelry.

From China, in addition to silk, traders exported jade (a stone sacred in Chinese culture), silver, iron, and bronze mirrors. They eventually introduced paper and tea—two transformative inventions that would leave an indelible mark on global culture. Indian traders contributed soft cotton textiles, vibrant dyes, and precious gems alongside spices thriving in the warm climate of India.

From the Arab world and the Middle East came fragrances and flavors desired for their aroma and taste, including frankincense and myrrh, both highly valued in religious ceremonies. Spices like cinnamon and cardamom, dates, and intricately carved tortoise shells also made their way along these routes. Central Asia, situated in the middle of the trade routes, was famous for its powerful horses, especially those from the Ferghana Valley—so strong and swift that the Chinese labeled them "heavenly horses."

The diverse nature of goods meant that the Silk Road functioned like an expansive shopping mall connecting continents—allowing one to experience Chinese silk, Indian spices, and Arabian incense all in the same place.

#### The Journey: Challenges of Travel

However, traversing the Silk Road was fraught with peril. The geography posed immense challenges. Traders had to demonstrate bravery, intelligence, and resilience to survive. The principal overland routes began in ancient Chinese capitals like Luoyang and Xi'an. Caravans traveled westward, first needing to cross the Yellow River and then entering the critical Gansu Corridor—a narrow passage flanked by the craggy snowy peaks of the Tibetan Plateau to the south and the arid expanse of the Gobi Desert to the north.

The Gansu Corridor functioned as the only straightforward route from China into Central Asia, making it a focal point for Chinese emperors who fortified it through the construction of walls and forts to secure trade. At the end of this corridor lay Dunhuang, known as the "throat" of the Silk Road, where the route forked into three paths, anticipating the challenges of the immense Taklamakan Desert—the "Place of No Return."

Traversing the Taklamakan was treacherous; it consisted of rolling sand dunes where caravans could easily become lost, facing a fate of dehydration or despair. The paths of the Silk Road diverged: the northern route skirted around the Tian Shan mountains and offered slightly more manageable conditions, while the southern route navigated along the Kunlun Mountains.

The middle route attempted a more direct crossing; however, this path was perilous. Caravans relied heavily on oasis towns—vital lifelines where water emerged from underground—as gathering points to rest, resupply, and trade with local inhabitants. Towns like Kashgar, Turfan, and Khotan emerged as bustling marketplaces alive with diverse languages, cultural exchanges, and a plethora of goods reflective of the broader world.

Despite the vibrancy of trade, danger lurked everywhere. The desert's searing heat, sudden sandstorms, and the ever-present threat of bandits seeking to plunder valuable cargo were constant fears faced by travelers.

Additionally, local rulers often imposed exorbitant taxes on caravans, compounding the hardships endured on the journey.

## The Maritime Silk Road

To circumvent the arduous land journey, traders increasingly turned to sea routes, known as the Maritime Silk Road. Ships departed from southern Chinese ports such as Guangzhou and Quanzhou, navigating across the South China Sea and through the straits of Southeast Asia before reaching the Indian Ocean and beyond. Although daunting—given the risk of pirates, storms, and shipwrecks—maritime trade offered advantages. Ships could transport much larger cargo loads than a line of camels, making shipping valuable goods like fragile porcelain safer and more efficient.

## The Historical Evolution of Trade Routes

Trade along these routes did not commence during the Han Dynasty; instead, it developed gradually over millennia. Long before silk achieved prominence, jade was highly prized. During the Shang Dynasty, over three thousand years ago, jade was revered for its spiritual significance, leading traders to transport the precious stone from mines to the west, birthing the early "Jade Road."

Meanwhile, in the West, road networks flourished under empires such as Persia, where the famous Royal Road, constructed during the reign of Darius the Great in 500 BC, spanned over 1,500 miles and had rest stations facilitating rapid message transport. The campaigns of Alexander the Great, further east in the 300s BC, resulted in the establishment of cities named Alexandria, creating mixed Hellenistic cultures that paved the communication channels between East and West.

As silk trade flourished through connections established during the Zhou Dynasty, nomadic tribes, like the Xiongnu, began trading horses in exchange for silk. This circuitous evolution culminated in a robust network ready for engagement by the time the Han Dynasty emerged.

## The Han Dynasty's Expansion

The Han Dynasty facilitated significant progress in establishing the Silk Road we recognize today. With its expansionist ambitions, the Han sought allies against the fierce nomadic tribes threatening its borders. In 138 BC, Emperor Wu commissioned military officer Zhang Qian for a diplomatic mission westward. Though Zhang was initially captured and held captive for over a decade, upon his eventual escape, he encountered the rich civilizations of Central Asia, recognizing their potential value as partners in commerce.

Zhang's return to China in 126 BC—though he returned with just two of his original men—marked a pivotal moment in the history of the Silk Road. His reports about the wealth and military strength of kingdoms in the west illuminated the vast potential for lucrative trade. Emperor Wu recognized that establishing trade routes could be more beneficial than continued warfare.

Thus, the Han Dynasty initiated a series of expeditions to the West, establishing formal diplomatic and trade relationships. They constructed fortifications and built colonies, creating a secure environment for the burgeoning trade of silk and other commodities. This new response set the foundation for flourishing exchanges of goods, ideas, and cultures.

## The Flow of Ideas and Religions

While physical goods such as silk and spices were exchanged, the most enduring legacy of the Silk Road was the trafficking of ideas—most notably, the spread of religions. Buddhism, which had its roots in India around 500 BC, expanded north throughout Central Asia, eventually making its way to China as traders and monks traveled along these routes. They brought not just their faith but also sacred texts and artistic representations of Buddha, stirring deep interest in Buddhism among the Chinese populace.

Temples flourished along the Silk Road, exemplified by the ornate Mogao Caves at Dunhuang, filled with stunning examples of Buddhist art merging Indian influences with Chinese aesthetics. This cross-pollination of ideas fostered the rise of Buddhism, which subsequently influenced spiritual and cultural landscapes across Asia, reaching Korea and Japan.

Islam and other religions followed suit much later, spreading through the same channels of trade. From the seventh century onwards, Islamic traders disseminated their faith and cultural practices across Persia and Central

Asia before arriving in China, where Muslim communities thrived, especially in regions like Xinjiang. Nestorian Christianity, a branch of Eastern Christianity, also found a place along these trade routes, establishing vibrant communities in Central Asia and even during the Tang Dynasty in China.

### The Tang Dynasty: A Cultural Renaissance

Following a period of disunity, the Tang Dynasty (618–907 AD) heralded a golden age not only for China but also along the Silk Road. With a reputation for military strength and open-mindedness, the Tang emperors established control over trade routes, maintaining safety from banditry and securing prosperous exchanges.

The capital, Chang'an, evolved into the world's largest and most cosmopolitan city, housing over a million residents, including merchants and travelers from Persia, India, and Arabia. Crafting an urban tapestry rich in diverse goods, foods, music, and fashions, this city became a melting pot of cultures, driven by the thriving Silk Road trade.

The Sogdian traders, particularly, became pivotal figures during this time. Their mastery of languages and diverse cultures made them exceptional merchants and cultural brokers, leading to their rise as influential officials within the Tang administration. These traders not only facilitated commerce but also shared artistic and cultural traditions, shaping societal norms throughout China.

The remarkable journey of the Chinese monk Xuanzang in 629 AD captures this spirit. Tasked with finding original Buddhist texts in India, his illegal quest led him across the Silk Road, where he engaged with numerous cultures and ideologies, ultimately returning with invaluable insights and texts that enriched China's spiritual landscape.

### The Dark Side of Connectivity

However, the Silk Road also bore witness to a darker narrative—the transmission of diseases alongside goods. When individuals travelled and mingled, germs accompanied them, leading to outbreaks of plagues that devastated populations. The most notorious instance is the Black Death, which erupted in the 1330s and spread rapidly along the Silk Road.

Initially arising in Asia, the plague's travel accelerated as traders, often carrying fleas and rats on ships or camels, moved from town to town. The disease claimed an estimated 30–50% of Europe's population, causing significant social upheaval and economic shifts across the region.

This historical account serves as a sobering reminder of the risks that accompany an interconnected world. The spread of disease is a persistent theme in human history that parallels our modern experiences of globalization, such as the recent COVID-19 pandemic. The lessons learned from the Silk Road underscore the importance of vigilance in maintaining global health amidst our interlinked societies.

### The Decline of the Silk Road

Despite its flourishing past, the golden age of the Silk Road eventually waned. By the 1400s, several factors contributed to the decline of overland trade routes. The fragmentation of the Mongol Empire, which had previously ensured relative peace, left Central Asia divided into smaller, often warring kingdoms, making safe travel increasingly difficult.

Simultaneously, the rise of the Ottoman Empire, which captured Constantinople in 1453, brought about new taxes on goods passing through its territories, creating prohibitive costs for traders. Additionally, the Ming Dynasty in China adopted isolationist policies, directing focus away from maritime exploration and Silk Road trade.

As the land routes declined, European merchants sought alternative means to access the riches of Asia, leading to the Age of Exploration. This transformative period saw explorers like Christopher Columbus and Vasco da Gama searching for new trade routes, eventually discovering the Americas and establishing a direct maritime route to India.

### The Legacy of the Silk Road

While the Silk Road may no longer exist as a physical entity, its legacy is deeply ingrained in our world today. It laid the groundwork for the intricate web of trade and cultural exchange that defines our modern lives. The culinary landscape, for example, reflects this history; pasta in Italy shares origins akin to Chinese noodles, spices like cinnamon and pepper have become common staples due to ancient trade, and the very fruits we consume (oranges, grapes, and walnuts) spread along these routes.

Cultural syncretism flourished, too. The stories and teachings of Buddha traveled from India to Asia, reverberating through temples that showcased artistic blends of Indian, Persian, and Greek styles. Technological innovations like paper (originating from China) travelled westward and played a pivotal role in the democratization of knowledge during the Renaissance. Similarly, the compass, essential to navigators during maritime exploration, was a Chinese invention that changed the course of world trade.

On a genetic level, evidence suggests extensive human mobility and mixing along the Silk Road over centuries, resulting in the diverse demographics of Central Asia.

Today, the idea of a connected world echoes through modern advancements—our experiences are reminiscent of those ancient traders and travellers. Despite the rise of the internet, global commerce, and technological advancements in transport, the core principle endures: the exchange of goods, ideas, and cultures continues to influence our lives, much like it did for ancient traders.

Though traveling on the Silk Road is much easier nowadays, the colours of this rich path to diverse cultures never fade. It represents the history of human curiosity, ambition, and resilience. It emphasizes our innate desire to explore, engage in commerce, and learn from one another—an enduring testament to the interconnectedness of humanity. Though many things may have changed along the route, the connections they once forged continue to influence our world every day, revealing both the past glory and rich history, as well as the inspiring developments of modern trading connections.

# 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

# A Long Time Ago

*HD Beijing School, Lu, Watson –*

A long time ago, a group of people coming from China appeared in the western world. At first, these western people did not know who they were, until they saw silk bales on the back of their camels. News spread as quickly as possible, and more people came to these Chinese people to see what they brought. Only a few years later, silk had become the symbol of wealth and quickly began to affect the whole world. This butterfly effect only started with a group of people traveling in the desert. Nowadays, silk continues to be one of the most comfortable materials used for clothes, and surely few people have thought about the impact that silk and these Chinese people brought to us.

To understand the whole process, understanding the mechanism behind it is crucial. The Silk Road was not discovered by only one person; it is a continuous project that has lasted for many generations. In this process, many people chose to settle along the way, forming the complex trading networks on the Silk Road thousands of years ago. In the past, many people walked on this road, including soldiers, herdsmen, and even diplomats. However, there are two kinds of roles that contributed most to the Silk Road:

1. **Merchants:** Merchants are the most important people on the Silk Road. First, these people bought the silk provided in cities all over China, traveled across the deserts, and sold these silks to other merchants at a higher price, or directly to their destinations. Back in those days, there were few transportation options for people traveling on the Silk Road, so the products often needed to be bought and sold many times before they could reach their destinations. As a result, the price of silk had no way to be low, otherwise there would be no profit for the people along the way. Second, these merchants were the ones who made innovations and inventions to transport their products more efficiently, contributing to the development of future society. Also, as these people grew bored with selling only silk, they started to sell more kinds of things that came from China. For example, porcelain, tea and agarwood are all famous Chinese goods traded on the Silk Road.
2. **Literati:** Literati also played an important role in the Silk Road. In Chinese history, there is a famous man called Zhang Qian, who wrote many important reports to the emperor. It is these people who first introduced the Silk Road to the world, making the Silk Road more well-known. Also, these people are also a great source of stories nowadays. For example, *Journey to the West* is an incredibly famous fiction about mythical creatures, but few people know that the book was written while the writer was traveling on the Silk Road. These writers gave more creative inspiration to other writers around the world and attracted more people of different kinds to go and see the Silk Road.

Two kinds of things were traded on the Silk Road: knowledge and goods. For knowledge, it is quite easy to understand. People from various countries talked about different things with each other, and when these messages spread to the outside world, they had a high chance to give creative inspirations to the people in other countries, encouraging innovations and inventions to happen at an amazing pace. For goods, there are eight main goods that were traded on the Silk Road. These goods influenced the economy of the countries along the way and were often hard to make in other countries. First, as the name of the Silk Road suggests, silk is one main product traded on the Silk Road. This material is often made into clothes and is famous for its comfortable feeling when worn and how unique it looks compared to other fabrics. This is the main reason silk is often sold at an extremely high price. The second good traded on the road is a living animal: the horse. But these are not normal horses; these horses come from Mongolia and were trained to do heavy work or fight in wars. They are well known for their practicality and strength. In the past, when cavalries played a great role in wars, having better horses was the first step to winning a war. Besides, paper and spices were also traded on the Silk Road, mainly because they were produced in China—paper is a good tool for writing and decorating people's houses. Also, paper functioned like the ID cards we have today; people used written notes on paper to identify others. So why not bring some of these small and light things to sell? Another luxury item besides silk being traded is containers made of glass or jade. These are often made in China and transported by merchants on the Silk Road to other countries. In those times, these containers acted more like decorations or symbols of wealth, and even today these beautiful containers still command a high price. There were also some illegal things sold along the Silk Road.

Slaves, for example—because people can walk on their own feet and only need to be given food and drink to survive, selling people was profitable. These people often came from captives of wars. If these people stayed, they would waste a lot of food and drink, so selling them was the most convenient way.

Despite whom walked on the Silk Road and what goods were being traded, the Silk Road has clearly benefited the local economies near its path, allowing some wealthy people to buy some unique products, and letting governments expand their armies. Money flowing on the Silk Road provided a good opportunity for early globalization of the world. People from different countries sat together, communicating about what was going on in their hometowns, exchanging not only goods but also knowledge and information. These are the true benefits and influences of the Silk Road to the whole world.

# How the Silk Road Formed an Ancient Economic System

*HD Beijing School, Zhao, Regina – 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 Xi'an, 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 an unprecedented 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 proofs 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.

# Where Journeys Pause

*Jiaxing Senior High British Columbia Osshore School, Jia, Ruotong Regina – 17*

Seventy miles west of the Jade Gate, a crumbling wall of earth and straw is still standing strong against the desert wind. It is a relic of a caravanserai – it was far more than an inn. It was a fortified roadside complex, an important stop for caravans along the Silk Road. Caravanserais were places where Silk Road travelers found water, shelter and respite over a millennium ago. Their journey was measured not in miles, but in the distance between oases. Tonight, they rest here; tomorrow, they would face more barren sand. Today, a different kind of caravanserai operate through these ancient corridors. Near the old frontier, the Lanzhou New Area Logistics Hub is brightly lit at night. Here, automatic cranes move containers from trains from Central Asia onto trains heading for Europe. Information about every crate is tracked at all times. This is also a place where goods from all over the world are collected and prepared for delivery. At first glance, these two “caravanserais” appear to share nothing in common beyond their geographical locations. However, they are bound together by a single fundamental purpose: to make connection possible through mastering the art of pause.

Caravanserais were places where tired and thirsty camels carrying heavy loads and merchants could stop and rest. Spaced roughly a day's walk apart, these stations were lifelines. They offered safety from bandits and storms, water and food for animals and merchants, and a space for repairs. If an important caravanserai like Kashgar fell, trade along the whole route could be stopped for months. However within these walls built by the demands of survival, something unexpected flourished. The caravanserai made people interact. A Persian astronomer traced constellations in the sand to guide a lost Chinese merchant towards his destination; A few steps away, travelers of different faiths gathered around the same campfire, using scattered words and gestures that everyone might understand to express their respective beliefs. Here, language failed, yet understanding miraculously took hold. The constellation drawn in the sand might later find its way into a navigator's map in Chang'an; the ideas shared by the fire could resound in a temple a thousand miles away. The caravanserai, therefore, did more than a sanctuary, it became an accidental amplifier for the seeds of human thought and belief. Thus, while its most immediate purpose was survival, its most profound contribution was the “unscripted exchange.”

If the ancient caravanserai was an answer to the limits of camel and human endurance, its modern counterpart is engineered to overcome the limits of time and information. Now they are called hubs. Its priority changes from surviving to efficiency in this process. At Xi'an International Inland Port, it's hard to say that goods ever truly “stop”. It may sound unbelievable, but they are constantly in a state of moving. Consider this: Within hours, Kazakh wheat is sorted, Chinese electronics are customs-cleared, and both are loaded onto trains. The pause is designed to be short and productive. Not only that, the modern hub also possesses other functions. Let's follow a load of goods on their journey: arriving at Khorgos from inland China, it's still just standard “Made in China” components. Here, it's sent to bonded warehouses near the border and assembled with parts from Central Asian partners. By the time it sets out again, it may have been rebranded for an international market, its value transformed completely. The hub is like a nerve centre in a huge network of commerce.

Times change and roles evolve, but these “transit stations” has always had the same purpose. Ancient caravanserais changed tiredness into energy and loneliness into temporary togetherness. The modern hub changes raw materials into integrated supply and data into better routes. In a more subtle way, they both turn strangers into partners. The trust built between a Sogdian merchant and a Tang official over many years of repeated visits is similar to the “joint inspection” protocols developed by Chinese and Kazakh customs agents today. These procedures were created because of contacts and needs. These spaces are where abstract ideas like “trade” and “cooperation” are put to concrete actions. As a result, connection never stops—it merely evolves from fortuitous convergence into designed cooperation. Ancient caravanserais were places where people forced to build connections amid shared vulnerability in the face of existential crises. Today's hubs proactively design encounters, making collaboration a predictable, flexible, and enduring system. We have moved from coincidence to inevitability.

Therefore, as we trace the ceaselessly pulsing route on the map, we must not overlook these fixed points. They reveal a wisdom spanning millennia: the longest journey relies not only on moving forward, but also on making wise pauses. In spirit, the task of the keeper who draws water from a well and the engineer who models optimal container stacks is the same. They are in charge of the places where different journeys meet, where goods are exchanged, and where understanding is created. The Silk Road never ended. It just found new ways to rest and grow stronger.

# Silk Road: A Network of Trade, Technology, and Culture

*Jiaying Senior High British Columbia Osshore School, Lu, Yanjin Annie – 17*

Silk Road was the oldest trade network that connected China with Europe and Asia. It originated in the Han Dynasty around 130 BCE. Historians called it “Silk routes” as a plural form because it consisted of many routes that were interconnected with each other. In Chinese usage, we call it “Silk Road” for a normal expression that is taught from generation to generation. As the Internet of the ancient world, it moved goods, ideas and inventions faster than any road before it. What mysteries lay behind ancient innovations and cultural exchange?

To solve them, let's start with the mystery itself: where did the label come from? The name “Silk Road” did not exist in ancient times. Although Marco Polo crossed paths and recorded them, he didn't give it a formal name. In 1877, a German geographer Ferdinand von Richthofen named it “Seidenstrasse” (Silk Road) on China maps from east to west. Polo's record showed the routes' range, but Richthofen turned this range into a single phrase and it was adopted by the scholars. The Silk Road transported many valuable things like silk and gold through nations. Soon it became a fashion that lasted for many years.

Silk, more than any other good, defined this trade and its legacy. Silk was a symbol of high-value products due to the light weight, vivid and high price. China benefited from silk a lot through the Silk Road. Silk is the continuous protein filament secreted by larvae, reeled and woven into clothes. In ancient China, silk was a main type of material that could make comfortable clothes. It was rare because only China produced it. Silk was a luxury in other countries, which made it a signature of China. For example, the island of Kos became wealthy and luxurious through their manufacture of silk clothing. As Durant wrote: “Italy enjoyed a “favorable” balance of trade—cheerfully buying more than sold, but they still exported rich goods to China such as carpets, jewels, ambers, metals, dyes and glass.” Through the Silk Road, silk represented all the high-value goods from China. That is why it was called “Silk Road”.

Yet, its true legacy extends beyond material wealth. It was, more importantly, a highway for knowledge, technologies and philosophies. Nowadays, we use the Internet to access the information we want. In the past, Silk Road was another Internet, but it was transported by camels. The Silk Road transmitted culture pockets such as innovations, faith and blueprints. The key aspect of the Silk Road was technology, including agricultural innovation and financial innovation. Chinese agricultural methods were used in other countries. For instance, the crop rotation and drought assistant doubled the yields and stabilized the economics. Chinese paper money accelerated trade and reshaped the financial system. Paper money was lighter than a coin and harder than a counterfeit, which made the trade smoother and more efficient. It eliminated transactional barriers from spreading the newest innovations to the west. The road's real cargo was not silk, but acceleration—the same acceleration we now associate with Wi-Fi. This network proved that humans were globally connected long before the digital age.

And that ancient connection lives on—from Marco Polo's record to Richthofen's maps, from the label of Silk Road to the value of silk itself. The Silk Road was not merely a historical route; its spirit is reborn in the everyday networks we build today. The Silk Road as a heritage continues today: In 2021, China and four central Asian countries—Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan signed the first Shanghai Cooperation (SCO) agreement dedicated to protecting the heritage. Two years later, in 2023, China and all five Central Asian nations jointly established the Silk Road Archaeological Cooperation and Research Centre in Xi'an.

# One Road, Thousands of Cultures

*Jiaying Senior High British Columbia Osshore School, Zhao, Sihan Kelly – 18*

Two thousand years ago, a few Chinese traders began to travel to the West. This journey eventually connected cultures and civilizations. The Silk Road was an ancient trade route that connected Asia and Europe. It started in the 2nd century BC. It was not only a road but also a chain to connect cultures, religions, technologies and ideas between different countries. Unfortunately, this road fell into decline in the 15th century because the waterway became popular. The history of the Silk Road reflected the desire of people to communicate with other cultures, promoting the progress and development of both Western and Eastern civilizations. To have a deeper understanding of the history of the Silk Road, the relationships between the Silk Road and ancient cultures are crucial. Another point is about what caused its decline and the cultural heritage after the decline.

The Silk Road was not only a road to exchange products, it was also a way to exchange cultures, building communications between different cultures. The product also included non-material culture, promoting the development of a variety of cultures. For instance, Buddhism was introduced to China from India and it became popular and local in China. Chinese papermaking skill influence European Renaissance. Also, when the compass was introduced in Europe, Magellan used it and it played an important role for him to travel around the world. For art, Western and eastern influenced each other. The porcelain influenced European artistic style. The oil painting from western redefined the colorful works for Chinese people. The cultural integration and creation showed the importance of cultural diversity in a country. The value of the Silk Road is to connect the divided land, forcing people to build a global world.

There are many aspects that make the Silk Road decline, and economic system and political changes are two of them. Especially for the development of waterways in Europe, the land route is not convenient, so people preferred the low-cost and high-efficiency waterway for trading. The Cape of Good Hope route of Portugal was one of the most famous routes. People sent silk, spices and eastern products to Europe by sea. For political reasons, the Chinese people almost gave up the Silk Road because the government began to reduce the amount of products for exporting. The way of trading changed, symbolizing the world trade center transformed from land to sea. The waterway reduced the function of trading but the heritage of cultural connection and memories was not lost. The spirit of openness and cooperation it carries is buried between Chinese and Western civilizations, waiting for the new era.

Silk Road shows its openness and inclusiveness of cultures and these spirits are still valuable in today's society. Looking back the history, and we can see the cooperation and friendly communications between countries and nations. The Silk Road has become a global cultural heritage since it is not only protect the unique Chinese culture and civilization, it also promotes Western and Eastern cultural integration. Based on the history, it teaches us understanding and respecting different cultures outweighs economic interest. Silk Road is not only about history, it also carries ancient people's wisdom and how they maintain openness to foster progress and peace.

Overall, Silk Road shows the pursuit of communication and collaboration of human beings. It serves a bridge to connect diverse cultures, proving that openness and cooperation are essential to human advancement. Today, we carry the same courage as our ancient pioneers, working together to promote peace and understanding. From the ancient world to modern society, it connects different cultures, proving that openness and cooperation have always been the fundamental path for the development of human society. Just as it began with a longing to connect, it will continue to develop through the shared growth of human civilization. This road has never really disappeared, it just connects the world that is willing to communicate in a new form.

# 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 Macao 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 Macao 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.

# Echos of the Silk Road: Bridging Past and Present

*Pui Ching Middle School (Macau), Guo, Ana – 17*

The kind of wind that blows through Gansu Corridor is not just blowing. It is scouring. It brings two-thousand-year-old dust to Yumen Pass, or Jade Gate. Zhang Qian two thousand years ago was no merchant. He was an emissary of Emperor Wu of Han. His mission was to find an alliance in order to counter the Xiongnu. He would walk voluntarily to his death. Without the knowledge that would one day give him back his freedom, he would have nothing now but toiled-over food in prison. However, he would find love in captivity. Love would make him one of them. He would return no hero. Not as an unyielding messenger from China. Not as a conqueror. He would return as one who knew “blood-sweating horses.”

Now, I felt its pulse again, not in a textbook, but here, on a humid platform, in Chongqing. A crane at Tuanjiecun Station raised a blue shipping container stamped Yuxinou, Chongqing-Xinjiang-Europe Railway. Inside, laptops were packed for Duisburg, Germany. Mr. Chen, a logistics manager with a tired, nervous look, said, “Ten thousand kilometres. Fourteen days by train. Forty-five by sea. Five times the cost of air,” according to Mr. Chen. He didn’t say Zhang Qian or cold horses. He said tariffs. He said gauges. He talked about supply chains. Yet as the train moved west, I felt history echoing: Zhang’s camel moved at 4 km/h; this “Steel Camel” rushed at 80. Zhang feared arrows; this train faces geopolitics. But the aim remains: connect, trade, survive.

Launched by President Xi Jinping in 2013, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is often described in the West as politics or a debt trap. But as I rode across Central Asia, I saw another tale, one of personal adaptation. In Almaty, Kazakhstan, I met Aigerim, who is learning Mandarin and English to work at Khorgos Gateway, a dry port constructed in the desert, where trains change tracks between China and former Soviet republics. “My grandfather was a shepherd,” she said. “My father repaired tractors. Now I’m standing in the middle of a map connecting Shanghai to London. We’re not landlocked, we’re landlinked.”

Here is the New Silk Road: reimagining space. For the last several centuries, maritime powers were in charge, leaving Eurasia’s interior in the doldrums. Now roads, ports, pipelines are building an economic corridor. But roads can be blocked. In Pakistan’s Gwadar, fishermen fear that port construction will kill their way of life. In Sri Lanka, the 99-year lease of Hambantota Port after a default on debt is a caution. The BRI is not abstemious; it is a kind of diplomacy that hardens ambition with concrete.

However, labeling this movement as neo-colonialism really does a disservice to local agency. A young Kenyan, David, who was one of my students, said, “For fifty years, the West preached privatization but did not build a single rail. Suddenly now, there is a railway between Mombasa and Nairobi. Four hours. That changes lives.” That is the Global South finding its feet in a new world-order: not preaching from Washington or London, but experiments set in Beijing, Astana, and Nairobi.

And, given the Millennium shift from tangible to intangible, the New Silk Road is not carrying just tangible goods, but the intangible, like the Digital Silk Road. Fiberglass cables. 5G networks. Alibaba and WeChat. In Hangzhou, I watched a digital map of real time transactions light up along modern analogues to ancient caravan routes: a farmer in Russia buys a package of drones from Shenzhen; a shop keeper in Malaysia orders textiles from Yiwu. At a tea stall, I tried to pay cash, and the vendor pulled out a QR code, sighing: “You’re young, but old-fashioned.” Here, payments have bypassed credit cards and gone straight to WeChat. And cultural goods flow, too: Thai dramas are a hit in China, while, in Tanzania, a kung fu movie was dubbed into Swahili.

But shadows follow. The same technology that enables seamless trade also allows for surveillance. Exported “Safe City” cameras raise questions about privacy and government control. The Old Silk Road brought the Black Death; the Digital Silk Road risks spreading digital authoritarianism. Every route carries both medicine and poison.

At its core, this story is about people. On a high-speed train from Xi’an to Lanzhou, I met Omar, a Jordanian businessman fluent in Mandarin. “I came to Yiwu ten years ago,” he said. “Thought I’d stay a month. Fell in love with the chaos.” He showed me photos of his Chinese wife and children, who eat falafel and roujiamo and

speak Arabic and Chinese. “They are children of the Silk Road.” Omar is the modern Zhang, a bridge, a return to historical normalcy. For most of history, East–West exchange was strong; isolation was the exception.

Education drives this revitalization. China leads as a destination for African and Asian students. They return home with degrees and an understanding that bypasses the filter of Western media. At a seminar, an Ethiopian graduate debated about the sustainability of debts with pictures projected, rather than World Bank reports, of the new railway station in Addis Ababa. They talk about alternative ways of thinking about development, and it’s up to the New Silk Road to challenge the world to learn them.

Looking ahead, critics warn of debt defaults and political backlash. China’s economy is slowing down; Europe is becoming more cautious. The initial rush is over; we are entering an era of “small but beautiful” projects, more careful and calculated. But betting against the reconnection of Eurasia is betting against geography and history. The logic of the Silk Road is gravity: resources, people, and ideas flow toward connection.

The Green Silk Road can be a game–changer. China leads the way in solar and wind production. Imagine Saharan solar farms powering Europe, and Central Asian wind energizing East Asia. Trade is also becoming more inclusive, and the building of roads through hitherto neglected regions allows additional voices to be heard in the global village. This puts a question mark over dominance from the Atlantic, foreshadowing a multipolar world in the same diversity as experienced during the Tang dynasty.

But success needs trust. The Old Silk Road flourished under Pax Mongolica. Today we need a different type of peace – a shared belief that trade beats war, and that open roads can defeat closed borders.

Back at Yumen Pass, tourists take selfies next to crumbling ruins. But if you step off the path and close your eyes, the wind still howls. The dust still tastes of history. Picture Zhang returning, weathered and carrying saffron unknown to his people. He’ll sell it for a fortune, but what truly excites him? The stories, for his grandchildren. Stories of vast, terrifying, beautiful worlds beyond the sunset. Of laughter and sorrow shared across cultures. Of roads that don’t end at horizons but begin anew.

Now, however, the focus turns to the present. On a high–speed train, it speeds past the Jade Gate ruins. On the computer screen inside the train, the engineer named Wei works on a schematic for a solar project in Uzbekistan. She looks out and sees the ancient watchtower flash by. For a moment, two worlds overlap: camel and train, saffron and solar panel, old spirit and modern drive. She doesn’t know Zhang. But she follows in his footsteps. The Silk Road never disappeared; it slept, waiting for the world to wake. The bells ring again, not from camel necks, but from satellites and locomotives. The story continues, written in steel, silicon, and lasting hope. The road is open. The journey begins again.



# Non-fiction

Group 6

# The Silk Road

*Korean International School Springboard, Setyawan, Kai – 10*

The Silk Road is a route where people went trading in the past. It spans from Europe all across to Asia. The Silk Road passes important cities such as Xi'an in China, Constantinople in Turkey, and Balkh in Afganistan. In the ancient days, people traded gemstones, fruits, incense and (unfortunately) also human slaves to other countries. They form caravans with camels to go through the route. They needed camels because there was no transportation at that time, and they needed to go through the desert. Because of the silk road, people could buy food from another country. The merchants gained money. Unfortunately, merchants travelling the Silk Road also brought diseases, like the black death.



# Non-fiction

Group 7

# Outsmarting Saul in the Silk Road Scavenger Race

*Korean International School Springboard, Choi, Mattea Abbey – 17*

Once upon a time, the legendary Silk Road Scavenger Race brought a burst of excitement to the heart of China. Mofurun the bear, Bao Bao the panda, Rumi, Jinu, and Saul the Bandit eagerly stretched their limbs and adjusted their gear at the starting line. Mofurun bounced cutely on her paws, Bao Bao munched nervously on bamboo shoots, while Rumi and Jinu checked their compasses and maps one last time.

The radiant sun beat down on the dusty Silk Road paths as the race wound through ancient temples, market stalls, desert dunes, mountain trails, and finally to the finish line at Xi'an City Wall.

Sky, the brown kodiak bear, served as referee and raised her horn high. With a triumphant blast, the race began, and the contestants surged forward with their footprints pounding on the ground as Sky's horn echoed along with the cheering of the crowd, their spirits soaring as the adventure unfolded!

The goal of the race was to discover hidden jade jewels, golden coins, and ancient symbols carved into stone—each representing precious goods like silk, spices, and tea that once travelled the Silk Road's dusty paths. Before the race began, Sky reviewed the essential rules with all candidates. Whoever cheated and didn't follow all of the instructions throughout the race would be disqualified.

Excitement filled the air as the race began! However, one participant wasn't following instructions and was constantly cheating during the race. And that participant was none other than Saul himself!

Saul is a greedy bandit, obsessed with amassing wealth and hoarding treasures stolen from the rich, with no regard for fairness or playing by the rules. He intentionally attended the event because the prize for the winner is based on one of China's treasures, so he decided that if he wins, one way or another, he can put it into his stash of treasures.

Throughout the race, Saul kicked sand into Jinu's eyes, tied Rumi's shoelaces together when she wasn't looking, and even pushed Bao Bao into a muddy puddle; Mofurun had to aid her friends as a result. He snatched maps right out of their paws and stuffed stolen jewels and coins into his bulging satchel. He even used secret passageways to quickly reach locations, though it wasn't allowed. "That prize will be mine and mine alone, and none of you can stop me from making this reward a part of my treasure collection!" bragged Saul as he began bolting away from the contestants.

"That annoying bandit, always breaking the rules!!!" scowled Rumi angrily. "He will seriously feel our wrath!" fumed Bao Bao with a mouthful of bamboo rice crackers. Both Mofurun and Jinu agreed with them, as they were all irritated with Saul's malicious behaviour. They all wanted to stop him. But how? They were currently having a quick break from running at Lanzhou, and they were all fed up with the horrible treatment they received from Saul. Even so, their destination was near the final course!

Mofurun and Rumi thought and thought until all of a sudden, a wonderful strategic idea came to their mind. "Rumi and I came up with an excellent plan to stop Saul for good ~MoFu!" exclaimed Mofurun. She always ends her sentences with "~MoFu". "Here's the plan ~MoFu! Bao Bao will distract Saul with fake jewels while Jinu and I circle around to retrieve our stolen items ~MoFu. Then, Bao Bao and I will search for the last remaining coins, jewels, and symbols ~MoFu. Meanwhile, Rumi will document all his cheating with her camera as proof for Sky while Jinu blocks Saul's escape routes ~MoFu!" After sharing their strategy with Jinu and Bao Bao, everyone agreed enthusiastically. Together, they were determined to put an end to Saul's wicked deeds once and for all!

At the last leg in Xi'an, the Han dynasty capital of China, all of the contestants went along with Rumi and Mofurun's plan. They dodged every one of Saul's cheating and vile movements as Bao Bao made her move to distract Saul with false jewels. Jinu and Mofurun secretly retrieved their stolen things while Saul was distracted and not looking. Very soon, while Mofurun and Bao Bao began to search for the last remaining symbols and jewels, Rumi and Jinu

worked together like lightning—Rumi snapped photos of Saul's stolen goods while Jinu cleverly cornered him against an ancient city wall, blocking his escape route.

Soon, with Saul falling behind due to the impact of Mofurun and Rumi's tactics, the four friends charged towards the finish line together. Then, they informed Sky of the entire incident regarding Saul's horrible behaviour throughout the entire race, with Rumi's camera photos as proof. Consequently, Sky declared that Saul was hereby removed from the event. "I WILL GET MY REVENGE ON ALL OF YOU!" stormed a furious Saul loudly upon hearing Sky's decision.

As for the rest of the participants, Mofurun, Bao Bao, Rumi, and Jinu officially won! They all received their prize: Silkworm Chinese lucky charms—each one delicately crafted with shimmering red and gold silk threads, adorned with tiny jade crystals that sparkled in the sunlight. The charms depicted silkworms on mulberry leaves, symbolizing prosperity and good fortune. "Wow. This is wonderful!" said Jinu and Bao Bao, as Mofurun and Rumi agreed in unison. They were so happy to have participated in "The Silk Road Scavenger Race," and Saul was far from achieving his scheme of including the charms in his treasure collection.

# From Ancient Rome to Modern Highway: Marco Polo's Journey Along the Silk Road

*Korean International School Springboard, Fan, Ethan Ka Chun – 17*

Marco Polo, Niccolò, and Maffeo traveled along the Silk Road, departing from Venice, Italy, in 1271. During their journey, the Polos passed through Erzurum (Eastern Turkey) and Tabriz (Northern Iran), then crossed deserts threatened by brigands before reaching Hormuz on the Persian Gulf. The Polos decided against taking a sea route and instead continued overland to China.

After leaving Hormuz, they traveled to the Khorasan region and turned gradually northeast as they reached more hospitable lands. The Polos stayed in Badakhshan, Afghanistan, for one year because the benign climate was particularly beneficial for travelers. Marco had fallen ill, and the region's climate helped him recover and avoid malaria. During this period, Marco also visited territories in southern Afghanistan, Kafiristan in the Hindu Kush, and Chitral. It is difficult to establish which districts he actually traveled to versus those he described from information gathered en route.

After leaving Afghanistan, the Polos continued toward the Pamirs, following the route across the highlands of Central Asia.

Before entering China, Marco Polo had to travel across the great Gobi Desert. Crossing the desert took months, and it was said to be haunted by spirits. Descending the northeastern side, they arrived at Kashgar, now part of the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region of China.

When the Polos arrived in China, they traveled through regions inhabited by Muslims and Nestorian Christians. They also encountered Buddhists, Manichaeans, and Zoroastrians in the vast province of Tangut. The travelers stopped in Suzhou, Ganzhou, and other cities. In 1274, they reached Shangdu, the Mongols' summer capital, and entered the Mongol Court. In 1275, the Polos presented sacred oil from Jerusalem and papal letters to Kublai Khan.

In 1295, after traveling the Silk Road for 23 years, the Polos returned to Venice, Italy. After returning to Venice, Marco found the city at war with Genoa. While imprisoned, Marco told detailed stories of his journeys to a writer named Rustichello, who compiled them into a book called "The Travels of Marco Polo."

This popular book was translated into multiple languages and read throughout Europe. After Kublai Khan's death, China came under the Ming Dynasty, which was wary of foreigners, making information about China scarce. Marco's book became even more valuable and popular.

The legacy of the Silk Road continues today. Modern transportation, such as trains, has dramatically reduced travel time compared to the months-long journeys of Marco Polo's era. In ancient times, silk production was expensive, and the Chinese emperor kept the process secret. Eventually, it expanded beyond China to India and Japan, then to the Persian Empire. Modern silk production is much cheaper due to reduced transportation costs. Today, the Silk Road functions through multiple trade routes and partnerships, serving as an international hub for commerce. Modern Silk Road routes open new opportunities for travelers, and travel between East and West is now easier than ever before.

# Six Traders, One Dream

*Korean International School Springboard, Lin, Adrian – 20*

Once upon a time in Wuhan, China, there lived a family who wanted to start a trading business. They are called the Jiangan family. Zhang is the head of the family and his wife is called Wei. They are the head of the Jiangan Family, are in their mid 30s, and they have 4 children who are mostly boys named Yue, Nai, Lan, and Wen living together in a house. Together, they like to go fishing in the lake, make dumplings, and garden. The 4 boys are in their teens and they are joining the trading with their family. So the whole family will trade together by traveling to western China.

“We’re bored and we want to do a lot of trading to make better business!” said Lan eagerly. “Ok! We will go together as a group.” Wen replied. The family then set off on their trading route going west of China. They were trying to sell various items made in China such as gunpowder, silk, and fruits such as lychee, peaches, dragonfruits, and mandarins to the people who live there. “After gathering the fruits, Zhang suggested, ‘Let’s trade them to Jingzhou!’ ‘Good idea!’ said Nai excitedly. The family then continued with their journey westwards to do trading smoothly.

Suddenly, when they arrived in Chengdu, Sichuan, they met Dingken, a merchant guild leader. Dingken is in his 60s and he used to be friends with Wei, but was bullied by one of Wei’s friends. He is a very strict man who doesn’t allow people to visit Chengdu. Dingken yelled “What are you doing here? You guys are not allowed to enter Chengdu! My merchants are here and you shouldn’t be visiting my hometown!” The family got angry with Dingken but they tried to ignore his warnings and proceed with trading in Chengdu. “I’m going to tell the armies to escort you guys away from Chengdu!”

“We’re unhappy about Dingken’s feelings on trading in Chengdu! Let’s find a solution so that we can solve the problem together!” said Wei. The family continued to think of a way to solve the conflict with Dingken. “Dingken and Zhang negotiated and came up with a compromise on allowing them to visit Chengdu. “I’ll allow your family to do trading only if you will give me 10% of your sale!” The family accepted the deal with Dingken, but after a few days of trading. Finally, they decided to head towards Deyang because they wanted to have their full income in trading.

“Let’s head north to Deyang so that we can get back our full trading income!” Nai suggested confidently. “I agree with you Nai!” the 3 other boys echoed. After heading north to Deyang, the family continued their journey westward. In Chamdo, they faced unexpected challenges—difficult terrain and skeptical local merchants. But the Jiangan family’s reputation for honesty and fair dealing helped them overcome these obstacles. By the time they reached Nagqu, their name was known throughout China.

“The Jiangan family succeeded through integrity and teamwork!” merchants said with admiration. Yue’s negotiation skills, Nai’s eye for quality goods, Lan’s ability to build trust, and Wen’s careful record-keeping had all contributed to their success. Inspired by their journey and values, families across China started their own trading businesses, carrying forward the Jiangan family’s legacy of hard work, honesty, and unity.