



Non-Fiction

Group 2

The Silk and the Road

Vanessa Huang, 10, The French International School

Silk is a fine fabric. It is smooth, shiny, soft and comfortable to wear. In the summer it keeps you cool and in winter it keeps you warm. A long time ago, only very important people were allowed to wear it. Silk is made of silkworms' cocoons, which are made of long threads that are woven to make silk. Silkworms are native to Northern China but they can live anywhere that mulberry trees grow. Silkworm cocoons are made of filament that can be 600-900 metres long and can wrap around an ordinary-sized house eight times! Silkworms only eat mulberry leaves, and earlier, mulberry trees grew only in China and Japan. After one month of feeding, a silkworm will weigh 10,000 times heavier than it was.

The Chinese believe it was in 2640 BC when Chinese princess Xi Ling Shi discovered that silkworms' cocoons could make silk, when one dropped into her cup of tea. The Chinese studied the life cycle of silkworms and kept it to themselves. Anyone found guilty of smuggling silkworm eggs, cocoons, or mulberry seeds out of the country was put to death. Many people tried to guess what silk was. They thought it was a kind of down that grew on a tree. Some thought it came from inside a giant spider-beetle with eight legs.

Another legend is that there was a father who lived with his daughter and they had a magical horse. One day, the father went out on business but did not come back. The daughter sent the horse to look for him, promising that if the horse succeeded she would marry it. The father came back with the horse but was horrified at his daughter's promise. Desperate for his daughter not to marry a horse, he killed the poor horse. And then the horse's skin carried the daughter into the sky. They flew in the air and stopped on a tree. As soon as the daughter touched the tree, she turned into a silkworm. Everyday, she spit out long strands of silk. The strands of silk represented her missing him.

A Chinese princess who was marrying a foreign prince could not imagine married life without silk so she smuggled some silkworm eggs out of the country in her headdress. And the secret travelled to the West.

The Romans found out about these wondrous fabrics but were unaware of their origin. Silk was being transported overland to West Asia and over the sea to Japan. Because of the cost of transport, silk was very expensive and many ordinary people could not afford it.

The Silk Road was opened by Emperor Wu Di of the Han Dynasty in the 2nd century and slowly built up. It was not named 'the Silk Road' at first.

It passes through China, Korea, Tibet, India, Indonesia, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Turkey, Italy, Persia, Syria and Greece. It was built so countries could trade goods such as silk, ivory, linen, glass, precious gems, silver, and spices.

The ancient route starts in Xi'an and when it reaches Dunhuang, it divides into three: the Southern Route, Central Route and Northern Route, and they spread as far as Pakistan, India and Rome. The section in China is over 4,000 km long and over half the total length. It was not a safe route to travel. It had deserts and steep mountains. There were also castles, grotto caves, tombs, post houses and beacon towers. Bactrian camels were ideal for carrying goods through the sandy deserts. It was later named 'the Silk Road' by German geologist Ferdinand von Richthofen.

The Byzantine Emperor Justinian sent two Christian monks from West Asia on a mission to find silkworms' cocoons in 552 AD, so they could produce silk themselves making it affordable for many ordinary people. The monks returned with silkworm eggs hidden in their bamboo walking sticks and mulberry seeds under their tunics.

At the time of the Second World War, many countries' silk supplies were cut off, and silk was very rare.

After the war, Japan became the world's biggest silk producer with vast improvements until the 1970s. China regained its position as the world's biggest silk producer in the 1970s. The silk produced throughout the world in 1985 weighed 56,000 tons and China produced 50 percent of that.

When a large number of people migrated from China to countries in West Asia, they carried with them the secret of silk production. The knowledge of silk production took about 500 years to reach India. Even today, 5,000 years after the silkworm cocoon fell in the princess's teacup, China is still the world's biggest silk producer.



Non-Fiction
Group 3

The Seeking of Humanity

Sampson Kwan, 13, King George V School

It was once known as a mystical legend; once known as the greatest wonder of mankind; once known as the road to fortune ... Yes, you're correct, as you can see from the title, it's the Silk Road.

For thousands of years, the Silk Road has served as a link between China, the Middle East, Africa and Europe. It used to represent bravery, determination and courage. People would take years to struggle their way through the dangerous and hazardous Silk Road in order to achieve their hopes: friendship, communication, culture, and trading. They would suffer for years and years, experiencing sandstorms and starvation just to achieve them. The Silk Road represented humanity fighting for what they wanted. That was how it used to be in the past.

However, in the year 2011, there isn't much you can see on the Silk Road. What is left is the huge and vast areas of deserts and what used to be rich cities on the Silk Road are now destroyed or in poverty. Yet, within the ruins, much still remains. People would continue to go to the Silk Road as it is a historical site. However, the Silk Road has taken on a more significant meaning ...

Just because the Silk Road is destroyed, does that mean we don't fight for our hopes? As a trader of the olden times steps onto the Silk Road, he looks at the uneven road ahead of him. He sees the dangers that he has yet to face, sees all the sandstorms he has yet to overcome. Now, as we step into the 21st century, it is exactly what humanity faces. Humans yet continue to try and achieve different goals, including peace, new technology and overall, a better life. However, we achieve them in different ways, thereby forming the "New Silk Road" ...

Currently, what a lot of us are hoping for is to stop war. We realize how wars can cause a lot of losses and deaths and we have decided to find ways to stop it. We have formed the United Nations in order to maintain peace; we have negotiations between countries to prevent war. We are trying to achieve peace in our society.

Another hope for us is to advance in technology. Technology represents the advance of humanity, and it is advancing rather fast. Every once in a while, new improvements to technology such as cars, computers and phones will be released into the market, and exploration of space and science is constantly being done. We continue to hope for further advances in our technology.

In addition, we also seek knowledge, safety, wealth, health, freedom, equality and a lot more. Humanity is constantly trying to achieve these aspects and trying really hard to do so. That is because we want a better life. We want to create better living conditions, better medical support, and a safe place to live in ...

But is it really as easy as it seems? Well, as the famous American author Nicholas Sparks said, “Nothing that’s worthwhile is ever easy.”

Despite how many of us hope for peace, every day, on the television or in newspapers, we see reports of war and death; despite stepping into the developed 21st century, people still decide to go to war. In fact, just as I am writing this, North Korea has bombed an island of South Korea. Whilst advancing our technology, we still cause other problems while doing so. We cause the greenhouse effect to harm the earth, causing a threat to our environment and society; when we use too much technology, we also cause serious problems to our health as we violate the laws of nature. For example, mobile phones are said to produce radiation, causing health hazards. Another problem we now face is obesity. As there is an increasing amount of wealthy people, people are becoming more and more obese. To add to this, technology has caused lots of people to do less exercise, since it has provided other alternatives such as cars or trains. Despite all our efforts to seek a better life, have we really succeeded?

Every day, on our journey along the new Silk Road, we continue to encounter countless difficulties. We continue to try and use bravery, teamwork, wisdom and courage to defeat these difficulties.

Why do people have war? As Albert Einstein said during an interview, “Men should continue to fight, but they should fight for things worthwhile, not for imaginary geographical lines, racial prejudices and private greed draped in the colours of patriotism.”

Why do we overuse our technology? As the famous General Omar Bradley once said, “If we continue to develop our technology without wisdom or prudence, our servant may prove to be our executioner.”

Why is it so difficult for us now? In the olden Silk Road, people would ride on camels and walk for years and years, but at the end, they would succeed. Now, we have ships, trains, helicopters, airplanes and a lot more resources, but why has it gotten harder for us to succeed? That is because we take all these resources for granted every day, and we don’t seem to manage to use them properly. People are getting too ungrateful, causing them to wish impractical dreams, and start war, overuse technology ...

As producer Oprah Winfrey said, “Be thankful for what you have; you’ll end up having more. If you concentrate on what you don’t have, you will never, ever have enough.”

If Adolf Hitler had been grateful, he wouldn’t have wanted land, and therefore wouldn’t have started a dreadful war. If the 20th century Russian dictator Joseph Stalin had been grateful, he wouldn’t have wanted power, and wouldn’t have caused the deaths of more than 20 million people. If we were all grateful, wouldn’t we have a better life?

As a trader of the olden times steps onto the Silk Road, he looks at the uneven road ahead of him. He sees the dangers that he is yet to face, sees all the sandstorms he has yet to overcome. Stepping into the 21st century, it is what humanity is now facing. Despite the fact that we now have airplanes and modern technology to guide us through the dangers, we cannot do so without being grateful. Instead of using our technology properly, some of us, like Adolf Hitler, decided to use this technology for land and power, and therefore did not go forward on the Silk Road; some others decided to overuse this technology, causing them fail in the end.

As modern society steps onto the new Silk Road, we humans try to achieve hopes including peace, technology and overall, a better life. But what is even more important is that we be grateful for what we have, so that our society can advance forward. And if that comes true, our modern society would easily arrive at our destined location and we would have accomplished the seeking of humanity. That is what I hope; with this, we will be able to have a better life, an ideal future for all of us.



Non-Fiction
Group 4

Untitled

Ivan Siu, 15, South Island School

“I have not told half of what I saw” – Marco Polo

For thousands of years, we have been regaled by the stories and tales that have been derived from the connection of ancient trade routes connecting the east with the west, with great travellers such as Marco Polo, Nicolo Polo, Zhang Qian, and their grand adventures on that mystical and ancient pathway – the Silk Road ...

Flourishing during the Han Dynasty (202 BC–220 AD), the Silk Road was a collection of routes that spanned from Chang’an, (now known as Xi’an) China, all the way to Rome for the purpose of trade. There were three main routes; a northern route that spans westward towards the Black Sea near Europe, a central route that spans west towards Persia, Rome and the Mediterranean Sea, and a southern route that spans westwards to Iran and India. The Silk Road, established for the purpose of trade between the east and the west, was named after the lucrative silk trade, but there were many other precious goods that were traded such as: rugs, carpets, curtains, spices, herbs, semi-precious stones and more.

Despite the fascinating journeys on the Silk Road, many traders and merchants who took on the adventure did not return, as the Silk Road held many dangers, including unpredictable weather, poisonous snakes, bandits and pirates. Because of this, the Silk Road has become a hub for many tales and stories depicting the journeys of various merchants and their time on the Silk Road. Despite its importance, the decline in use of the Silk Road was evident by the end of the fourteenth century, due to the more popular overseas trade as well as the increasing dangers along the Silk Road. Having said that, in recent years, the magic of the Silk Road has once again captivated many around the world, bringing them to the journey as tourists and allowing them to experience the life of a trader or merchant, to be able to travel along the famous Silk Road, minus the bandits and pirates, of course!

Beginning the grand adventure in Xi’an China, many traders and merchants of the past would bring with them their goods to trade, supplies for the journey and enough companions to maintain their sanity along the way. Given the strenuous and perilous journey that was the Silk Road, many would venture through the many ancient routes that are now lost and forgotten, but the charm of the route still, after over 2000 years, captivates tourists and adventure seekers alike. The past users of the Silk Road would set off from their homeland and venture through a selected route to the expected destination to trade goods. Modern day tourists choose to take on the journey with a specific tour in mind, the more popular ones venturing deep into China, crossing through different cities including Shaanxi, Gansu, Ningxia, Qinghai, Xinjiang,

Urumqi, Beijing, Shanghai and more, putting together the many pieces of the puzzle that make up the Silk Road. This is similar to, and yet different from the past users of the Silk Road, as tourists specifically plan a certain route in order to enjoy the experience and not necessarily a route to reach a destination. Many tours nowadays offer various routes to experience the Silk Road, some starting from Xi'an and only reaching up to the border of China, others going farther to places such as Iran or India. Still, with the slow revival of the Silk Road, many routes are yet to be rediscovered and used for the purpose of tourism.

In terms of travelling, tourists today are able to avoid hiking under the scorching sun or trudging through the merciless desert, as merchants and traders of the past had done. With the aid of motorcycles and cars, in addition to the traditional mode of transport – camels – the journey may not be as rigorous, but is still certainly rewarding, as tourists experience the changing cultures along the Silk Road. Despite the differences, the experience has not altered that much by the weathering of time. Along the mysterious Silk Road, modern day travellers will find themselves immersed in rich cultural backgrounds and come face-to-face with the very relics our ancestors were once faced with. Unlike the traders or merchants of yore, people travelling for the purpose of trade are almost extinct on this route. No longer do you see active trading of goods along the Silk Road, and certainly, the many faces that appear on the Silk Road are those of tourists and travellers in search of adventure and excitement. Tourists should certainly look out for the different landmarks at each of the locations across the Silk Road, including the famous Terracotta Warriors in Xi'an, Mangao Caves (also known as the Mangao Grottoes) in Dunhuang, the Sunday Bazaar in Kashgar, as well as one of the most important historical landmarks in the world, the Great Wall of China.

With all these relics and scenery to see along the Silk Road, tourists will surely be able to witness the glory of the ancient Silk Road. This once was a melting pot of cultures, where goods were a symbol for the existence of other places around the world; the Silk Road was responsible for the linkage of different civilizations unified by the purpose of trading. All this seems well and good, but the Silk Road was also famous for its power to capture people and never return them. With poisonous snakes, unpredictable weather, bandits and pirates, the Silk Road was as dangerous as it was fascinating. Many traders and merchants were also constantly lost during their time on the Silk Road; due to the many months spent travelling, they would sometimes develop hallucinations and eventually lose their minds. As Marco Polo explained it, *“When a man is riding through this desert by night and for some reason – falling asleep or anything else – he gets separated from his companions and wants to rejoin them, he hears spirit voices talking to him as if they were his companions, sometimes even calling him by name. Often these voices lure him away from the path and he never finds it again, and many travellers have got lost and died because of this.”* As frightening as that sounds, modern day tourists no longer have to worry about the many dangers that traders and merchants once had to face. No longer are there bandits or pirates, and despite the dangers of weather, snakes and getting lost, chances are reduced to a minimum by the careful planning of tourism boards and advanced technologies that aid in the Silk Road experience for modern day travellers.

The Silk Road was once a vital collection of routes for traders to explore the different cultures that emerged from the depths of the land. Trading between countries took months, sometimes even years, to complete, and the history of the ancient routes can still be found seeping through the many relics and sights across the routes today. Tourists today can venture through the sands and storms of the Silk Road, with the aid of modern technology and careful planning from tourism boards to ensure a safe, exciting and all-round great Silk Road experience. Just as Marco Polo and other great adventurers once did. So what are you waiting for? Join a trip to the Silk Road now!