

Winning Entries



HONG KONG YOUNG WRITER OF THE YEAR

Fiction – Group 3 Winner

Woven

Diocesan Girls School, Lau Tsz Yi Stella, –

In the grand tapestry of the fourteenth century, the Silk Road had been ebbing much before anybody acknowledged it. It started falling out of favor unobtrusively--slack business, nervous traders and little collapses, like cracks in old ware.

The Dragon Trail wound through the bitter deserts and mountains, and the Passage of the Lunar Serpent, a maritime route of vast, became hazardous. Ships were sunk in storms and pirates took control of new waters and the winds became unreliable. All ways were unsafe, all expeditions hazardous roll of dice.

Everyone felt the shift.

No one knew how to mend it.

And in the large market of Samarkand, where all the wealth of the world crashed together in dazzling colour, the rupture was expressed in one deafening crackle.

An Italian cart loaded with Venetian glass broke its axle under the weight of its load.

The beam of wood snapped as though it were struck with lightning, and the whole weight swayed, as though in a forward direction. Glassware--blown so much carefully in other distant shops across the water--smashed upon the ground, and scattered in a constellation of sparkling fragments. They caught the morning sun and reflected it back, as though a thousand ruined futures were broken up on the sand.

The camel driver cursed the mountains for their cruelty.

The Venetian captain cursed the sea for its deceitfulness.

Up they soared, in the air--two worlds colliding in an instant: land and water, delay and danger, tradition and risk.

But two people saw something else.

Dimitrios was amidst the chaos, as the others were, but his attention was not on the broken glass itself--rather, on the shattered world it represented. He grew up in the desert, yet was sea-bound, windblown, sand-covered--a man of contradictions.

He had towed shipwrecks and caravans through monsoons and droughts, and now, gazing at the cart's load lying there in pieces, he felt a silent conviction:

This was not an accident.

This was a warning.

His memories awakened—implicit and unavoidable.

Then a wave of nostalgia overwhelmed him:

He was a boy again, standing beside his father on the docks of Hormuz. A wrecked vessel was crawling into the port, its hull torn open, its sailors barely alive. His father had placed a hand on his shoulder, with shadowed wisdom learned from loss. “The sea gives with one hand and takes with ten.”

Those words were deeply rooted in Dimitrios’s heart and grew heavier with each passing year. He felt the old fear in his bones as he observed the traders’ arguments. The sea was failing. The old world was unraveling under its own contradictions.

Then Lin stepped into the scene.

She was an engineer of the Dragon-Trail—keen, steady-handed, soot-covered in the mornings—she had to repair the broken caravan wheels. While the others raved, she dropped to her knees beside the snapped cart and traced the fractured axle with her fingertips.

“The wheel isn’t the problem,” she murmured.

Her voice was calm, so calm that it cut through the rising arguments like a blade of clear thought.

“Every travel is independent, she continued. Each ship-load, each caravan, comes on alone. No flow. No continuity.”

Dimitrios blinked, startled by how clearly she voiced what he had felt but never dared articulate.

A chain of excessive weak links, said he to himself.

Lin shook her head and took her wax tablet. In quick certain strokes she drew a thing that was not yet anywhere in the world. Then she turned the tablet round to him.

The drawing was simple.

Revolutionarily simple.

Two continuous grooves carved into the earth, like rails, between station and station, and carried the carts on in an uninterrupted line. There will be no more independent caravans. No more isolated ships. One, twisting labor of motion.

Not a caravan.

Not a fleet.

A river of motion.

Dimitrios felt his breath catch in his throat.

“A road that never stops,” he whispered. “A road that carries the world.”

Nothing more, it was a sketch, one thought drawn in wax in the midst of a disorderly market, but it was at this time that the future changed.

And neither of them looked away.

It was not the labor of months that followed but the development of destiny. The news was spread easily among the people who were desperate to change. Artisans, blacksmiths, mathematicians, woodcarvers, mapmakers and architects began to gather. The proposal was impossible according to the old-world reasoning, but too tempting to those who had tried the sourness of a breaking system.

Together they carved grooves into the ground and ran tests of angle, depth and curvature. They constructed high wind-pulleys which caught the desert winds and converted them into motion. The waterwheels were fixed in the mountain streams and rotated the gears hewn out with great care. Relay stations sprang up like stepping stones all over the land, and by these never-ending rails they joined each other.

The work was slow.
 It was grueling.
 It was dangerous.
 But it never faltered.
 Everybody came, because all were in the same silent belief: craftsmen, traders,
 porters, scholars.

This road was common to them all.
 This was their salvation.
 And so the Silk Road began to breathe again.
 The first test came at dawn.
 Dimitrios was standing on the new track, the air still cool with the retreating night.
 There was fear and wonder as he touched the wood, which made his hands tremble. A cart
 full of rock was brought up on the rails, and its sails were made of canvas, as brown as the
 sunset. In case it crashed, the stone alone would be broken.

Lin raised the signal flag.
 The breeze was blowing across the desert, seizing the sails.
 Gears tightened.
 Ropes strained.
 And then—
 The cart moved.
 Slowly at first. Tentative. Testing its new world.
 Then with one graceful move, sliding along, as no caravan had known, gracefully.
 No jolt.
 No fight.
 No struggle against sand or storm.
 Only flow.

The onlookers gasped. Many had never seen such effortless motion, and had traveled
 their whole lives either across deserts or oceans. A camel jockey who had thirty years of the
 Trail wiped his eyes. A sailor accustomed to the restless sea whispered in awe, “This... this is
 steadier than the ocean.”

Something inside him shift, something was loosening up, and Dimitrios had wished it
 to happen without knowing it. The storm that had dwelled in his mind, the sound of the
 waves, the horror of drowning, appeared to subside. For the first time, there was no battle in
 travelling through mountains and deserts.

It felt like a connection.
 Lin walked up beside him with triumph in her eyes.
 “This is not a road built by one empire,” she said softly. “Or one people. It belongs to
 all of us.”

The cart flew by, sliding on as silently as a thought on the wind.
 It did not drag itself across the land.
 It moved with the land.
 It breathed with the land.

And to Dimitrios, in a sense which he could never describe to anyone, it dawned upon
 him that they had invented something the world had never heard of.

In the evening, when the sun was setting itself behind the horizon and had tipped the
 rails with molten gold, Dimitrios was standing alone by the track. Desert wind swept against
 him, and aroused the memories he had long kept in hiding.

Another memory rose unbidden—

It was like a storm around him, as he clung to a broken spar of wood, when he was young again. Waves were as much as living animals. Lightning carved the sky. The flavor of salt filled his lungs reminded him of the time he felt like the sea had swallowed him forever.

Many years later on, he had been under the opinion that the world was split: land versus water, security versus peril, good versus doom.

However, now, when the Silk Express was present, something changed.

He knew that the world had never been divided.

They had simply lost touch.

And the highway which they had constructed was no struggle with nature, but communion with it, unity of wind and of forest, of water and of mill, of man and of the magnificent landscape, with which it loved to be united.

His father's old warning echoed again.

“The sea gives with one hand and takes with ten.”

But here, to the first time, Dimitrios caught an unsaid fact behind the words:

If the sea takes, build where it cannot reach.

Should the world break apart, mend it up.

The Silk Express was such weaving.

Another Silk Road is emerging, and this time, it was not conquest that bred it or empire, rather it was a combination of the need to work together, necessity and imagination. A vein of intertwining reach was made between old divided lands.

A highway which had made disorder sanity.

Distance into connection.

Fear into possibility.

And as Dimitrios touched the warm rail he said, this is where it begins all over again, the world.

Because now he knew:

The Silk Express was not any road.

It was a rebirth.

An avenue that would unite the world.

HONG KONG YOUNG WRITER OF THE YEAR

Fiction – Group 3 Winner

What the Sand Remembers

ESF Sha Tin College, Iris Sun Shi, –

The sand has a memory.

It's the first thing you learn out here, in the crushing, gold-white silence between worlds. It holds the metallic scent of every spilled drop of blood from forgotten skirmishes for control of an oasis, a pass, a river crossing. It remembers every footfall; the measured tread of Tang soldiers, the heavy plod of Bactrian camels, the frantic scrambling of men caught in storms. It remembers every caravan that ever crossed its face, from Zhang Qian's exploratory missions to the great merchant trains of the Sogdians. It remembers the weight of empires: the fleeting shadows of the Huns, the relentless advance of the Han watchtowers, the disciplined patrols of the Tibetans, the swift horsemen of the Uighur Khaganate. It forgets nothing, just waits, for the wind to scour the story clean and start again.

It also remembers the exact moments where the silence broke, centuries apart.

The Storm

The storm hit Jun's caravan three days later. A *karaburan*, the black storm of legend, whose name the men whispered almost reverently. The horizon vanished and the world shrank to the howl of sand, scouring skin, cloth, and courage. The camels groaned and knelt. The men tied themselves together with ropes and huddled. Jun, in his terror, found himself reciting the ballads of frontier soldiers he'd once transcribed, his lips moving soundlessly, *uselessly*.

The bamboo tube against his ribs suddenly felt absurd, a toy of a distant, orderly world. It was his mission, holding words meant for a Tang general in Kashgar, words of strategies and alliances in the endless struggle to control the Silk Road. Jun, a minor scholar from a modest family in Chang'an, had been selected for his reliability and his clean hand, but more because he was expendable. It was a validation of years spent honing his script in dutiful obscurity, yet it was shadowed by bitterness. He understood that great poets and strategists were not sent into the maw of the Taklamakan.

He had travelled with a small Sogdian caravan for camouflage, a scholar amongst the boisterous, Zoroastrian-fire-worshipping traders whose language he did not fully understand.

One evening, by a dwindling oasis, a relic of the old Kushan irrigation lines, the old Sogdian guard Nergün had pointed to a slight ridge in the sand.

“See that? Not a dune. Something’s buried there,” he said. Jun had helped him brush away the grains. They uncovered a story: the parched, wooden frame of a cart, its design unfamiliar, possibly Xianbei from centuries past. Beside it, a human form, curled as if in sleep. The features smoothed by time and wind into an androgynous mask of peace. In the corpse’s clenched hand was a small, felt-wrapped bundle.

Nergün pried it loose. Inside was a Byzantine gold solidus, Heraclius’s profile worn soft, and a jade cicada, exquisitely carved from Khotan nephrite, meant for the tongue of a noble corpse to ensure resurrection in the Han tradition. This traveler, perhaps a mercenary or a renegade trader, had died carrying someone else’s passage to the afterlife.

When the wind died, the world was remade. Dunes had migrated like nomadic armies. Landmarks were gone. The oasis they were heading towards was buried under new, anonymous hills. Two camels were lost. Their water sacks, slashed by flying grit, were half-empty.

Panic settled over the caravan. Arguments in Turkic, Sogdian and Chinese broke out. The master was dead; his lungs filled with sand. Nergün took command. “We walk. That way!” He pointed to a blankness.

Jun watched the Sogdian guard read the sun like a book, interpreting the sand where the storm had brushed it. He learned to ration his spit, to ignore the blistering sun on his neck. His purpose, his precious message became just a shape, then a nuisance, then a part of him. He stopped thinking of Kashgar, of the Tang Empire’s celestial mandate. He thought only of the next step, and the next, and the next.

The Unknown

Centuries later, the memory of that desperation flickered on a screen in an air-conditioned trailer. Dr. Arman zoomed in on the satellite image. The proposed New Silk Road highway’s path was a red line cutting through endless amber desert. Right through Grid G-7, his team’s last dig. *The Place of the Wooden Cart*, they called it informally. A single find from a preliminary scan; the silica of wood, one human skeleton. But now the funding was gone. The permit was revoked. Progress had a new scripture, and it had cut Arman out.

In his trailer, Arman held a plastic bag. Inside was a single artifact recovered just before the shutdown. A small, exquisite jade cicada. The report would call it *Funerary Object*, likely Han Dynasty. But Arman thought of the hand that last held it. The sand had remembered the body and the object, but the name, the *why*, it was dust, and Arman hated it.

He packaged the cicada for shipment to the national museum, forever labeled *Provenance Unknown*.

The Shovel

On the fifth day of walking, Jun saw it. A glint of metal. Some kind of shovel, half-buried, left behind by some transient crew. He stared, uncomprehending. It was a shape with no context. He didn’t touch it. It was part of a story he would never, *could* never understand.

His lips were cracked and his vision was swimming, the world dissolving into a shimmering, treacherous heat haze where sand met sky, and every step forward felt like he was walking on knives, a bargain struck with the ground beneath his feet. Nergün was a dark, faltering shape ahead. Then, Nergün stopped. He sank to his knees in sudden, frantic purpose, his hands clawing at the sand. A sound tore from his throat, a ragged sob choked with disbelief that broke into a wild, gasping laugh. His fingers, raw and bleeding, had found

a promise: an unexpected, shocking coolness. A dark stain spread against the pale sand, then a seeping, muddy trickle. It was water from an old, buried spring, its source likely carved by Tocharian herdsman a millennium before.

They drank like animals, the mud coating their tongues. It was life.

That night, huddled by a feeble fire of tamarisk scrub that spat more smoke than warmth, Jun felt the sand, once as deep, as fathomless, as unending as the sea. Now it had traces of gravel and stubborn root. They were nearing the edge. He took out his dry inkstone and his last scrap of paper. With precious water, he ground the ink. He wrote not in the rigid *kaishu* of official documents, but in the swift, fluid *xingshu* of personal emotion. A private record.

The sand remembers the weight of empires, but forgets their names. It remembers the thirst, but not the prayer. I loved order, poetry and carried words of power for the Son of Heaven, but have learned the language of thirst, of wind. I am Jun, who survived. The message is intact, but the man who carries it is gone, remade by the desert.

He sealed the note and tucked it inside his robe, beside the official tube. One for the Empire. One for the sand.

The Cigarette

The next morning, thousands of years in the future, the foreman of the New Silk Road highway crew, a man named Li, lit a cigarette. The survey was done. The flags were up. This stretch was empty, boring. He kicked at the sand, revealing a black, twisted shape: a piece of old, rusted rebar. He threw it towards the pile of construction debris. It landed with a thud.

He didn't see the slight, human-sized depression in the sand nearby, a desperate man's kneeling prayer for water. He didn't feel the memory of the place, the whisper of a wooden cart, a final surrender, a group of survivors passing.

The Survival

When Jun stumbled into the *caravanserai* at Kashgar's outskirts two days later, he was celebrated as a miracle. He delivered his bamboo tube to the general's aides with efficiency. His duty was completed.

Before returning to the orderly world, Jun walked to the edge of the bustling outpost, where the desert began again. He took the jade cicada he had kept, tribute to the unknown traveler, and held it in his palm. He laid it on a flat stone, an offering to the wind and the memory, a gesture more Sogdian than Tang, an act not of the person he was, but as the person he had become.

Then he turned his back, leaving a piece of his story for the desert to keep.

The sand has a memory. It remembers the shovel, the rebar, the cicada on the stone. It remembers the storm and the taste of the mud. It holds the sigh of the scribe and the cigarette ash of the foreman. And it waits, patient, vast, unflinching, for the next wind, or the next road, to write over it all again.

Fiction – Group 1 WINNER

Whispers of the Desert

The Independent Schools Foundation Academy, Maya Suarez – 7

The shiny yellow sun yawned and stretched over the mountains as the caravan of camels began their walk at dawn. Sultan, who was the eldest of camels, pushed past Clumsy with his strong boulder shoulders. Clumsy stumbled in fright and dropped his porcelain pots. “That’s why they call him Clumsy everybody!” mocked Sultan. All the camels snickered and Clumsy’s eyes fell to the ground in embarrassment.

In the scorching afternoon, Clumsy felt a vibration whispering into his hooves. He stopped dead in his tracks and flared his nostrils bringing the whole caravan to a halt. A merchant yanked on his rope and yelled, “Move you stubborn sack of meat!” Suddenly, the path ahead collapsed with its soil and rock falling like a waterfall. The caravan had to take a detour around. Sultan scoffed at Clumsy, “Lucky oaf.”

When the sun's curtains began to draw shut, the moon took its dance onto stage. In front of the caravan, a narrow and dark canyon stood menacingly. The camels marched. Clumsy felt butterflies in his belly and slipped on some loose stones. Without realising, a sharp thorned tree branch had torn Clumsy’s bails of silk which were perched upon his back. After three hours, the camels were ordered to stop and rest. “Where’s all the silk?!” the merchant cried. His eyes glared with fire towards Clumsy. “You useless beast!” he scolded.

The next morning, Clumsy was sent to the back of the pack. Isolated. Feeling alone and unwanted, his head and neck hung down. While walking, he heard whispers of water rushing underground. Clumsy tried to warn everyone but no one would listen. He raced ahead past Sultan and guided them to a higher ledge. Without a moment to spare, a flood of water swallowed the lower ground out of sight. “How did you know?” Sultan asked. “I could feel and hear it,” replied Clumsy, “The desert speaks to me.”

Days had passed, but the caravan stood stranded on a high plateau without any water. “Can your whispering find us a drink?” asked a younger camel. Clumsy closed his eyes and blocked out the mocking memories. He felt the deep, cool song of the earth. Walking to a barren spot, he scraped it with his hoof and lay down. The humans dug and found a small spring. It was enough to save them all.

From that day, Clumsy led the caravan at the front with Sultan and the other camels followed with awed respect. He held his head high and always remembered to listen to the whispers of the desert.

Creative Writing: Fiction – Group 1 WINNER

The Secrets of the Silk Road

Po Leung Kuk Choi Kai Yau School, Gu Mi Lan – 8

Dapple, a little brown mouse with curious eyes, nibbled on a piece of sugar from a merchant's bag. She shivered, from excitement and a little fear. She knew many dangers—hungry eagles, endless deserts, and strange creatures—awaited her upon the legendary Silk Road. Yet Dapple was determined to see it for herself.

Suddenly, she heard a camel's deep grunt and squeaked in fright, nearly dropping her treasure.

"So thirsty! My throat is drier than desert sand!" one camel grumbled.

"Hmph! I'd leave this caravan now if they didn't give us seven meals a day with sweet grass and fresh water!" complained another, flicking its tail.

More camels joined in, their grumbles growing into such a racket that Dapple scurried deeper into the woven baskets, hiding behind a ball of soft silk.

Just then, a deep, rumbling laugh broke through the noise. An old camel named Sage, with fur weathered by many journeys, said with a calm but firm voice, "Youngsters, our caravan leader has given us more than we deserve. Did you already forget the terrible sandstorm that swept through just last week? Where would you be without his guidance?"

The camels, including little Dapple, trembled at the memory of howling winds and stinging sand. "The desert is not just an ocean of endless sand. Many secrets are hidden beneath, if you know where to look."

As days passed, Sage became a gentle teacher. He showed the young camels how to find an essential water plant by its special smell, and how to read the twinkling stars for direction and hidden weather signs. Dapple listened carefully, huddled nearby. "The true treasures of the Silk Road," Sage would say, "the skills, knowledge, and wisdom passed down by those who know the way. Remember, the journey itself is the greatest teacher."

When the caravan finally reached a bustling trading city, Dapple spotted a fierce warrior named Arash, his arms crossed and a scowl on his face. The silk weaver called out, "Silk! Strong, unbreakable silk! Perfect for kites and strong robes!"

Arash scoffed, "Unbreakable? Impossible! Nothing so thin can be strong."

The weaver smiled. "Let us have a contest." He tied a single, thin silk thread to a heavy stone, then asked Arash to snap it. He pulled and twisted, but try as he might, the delicate thread held fast.

The stocky warrior was stunned into silence. The weaver replied softly, "True strength is not always loud and hard. You see, gentleness and flexibility can be a powerful kind of strength, too." Grinning, the impressed warrior traded a shiny dagger for a full roll of glorious silk.

That evening, as the sun set in hues of orange and purple, Dapple felt her heart swell, glad she had come to the Silk Road. She had discovered different treasures and wonderful secrets along the way. Gazing at the road stretching ahead under the first stars, she was sure there were many more surprises waiting to be uncovered.

Fiction – Group 2

WINNER

Threads That Connect Us

Singapore International School, Sean Tan – 10

“Xiaolian! Xiaolian!”

In a small mud-brick house nestled on the dusty eastern stretch of the ancient Silk Road, twelve-year-old Xiaolian spent her days at the old wooden loom that had belonged to her ancestors. The loom stood in the corner of a single room, its frame scarred by generations of hands. Sunlight slipped through the narrow window, illuminating the tiny room.

Xiaolian’s grandmother rolled her wheelchair through the narrow hallway. Grandmother Li’s wrinkles never seemed to fade. Instead of her usual wrinkled face, her eyes sparkled with energy today. Xiaolian glanced up from her weaving, movement stalling in her hands.

“Yes, Nainai?” Xiaolian asked as she stopped weaving. Grandmother Li reached between her shawl and drew out a small, dark wooden box. The lid was carved with faded flowers, almost erased by time. She set the box on a table and took a seat next to her. “I have something special for you.”

Grandmother Li opened the box. Folded inside lay a silk scarf, its borders stitched with tiny symbols—circles enclosing crosses. Resting upon the scarf was a small rusty steel cross, its edges worn smooth from centuries of touch. Grandmother Li lifted the cross and placed it in Xiaolian’s palm. “Now, I must tell you a story.”

A story?

Xiaolian’s heart beat faster. She loved her grandmother’s intriguing stories. They were like threads connecting her to the past.

“This cross belonged to a brave traveller from long ago. It reminds us of him. Now, listen carefully.”

Rabban Bar Sauma was born in Khanbaliq to Nestorian Christian parents who had prayed for many years for a child. He grew into a gentle monk. At the age of 55, a restless longing pulled him westward. With his young disciple Markos, he set out on a pilgrimage toward Jerusalem.

They travelled the Silk Road for years. They walked across burning deserts where sand sang at night and through cities filled with unfamiliar people. At last, they reached Kashgar, a great oasis where every road seemed to come together.

“Now, your ancestor, Li Wei, was a street merchant who had migrated to Kashgar. He had set up a tiny stall in Kashgar, aiming to help Silk Road travellers.” Li Wei was a kind and honest person. He sold warm flatbread, offering travellers a relief from hunger.

On a sunny afternoon, as he fed crumbs to a stray goat that often visited his stall, he spotted two weary pilgrims among the crowds. Their robes were bleached by the sun, their sandals broken. Li Wei saw the exhaustion in their eyes and called them to his shade. “Travellers,” he said, “you look like you have come a long distance. My stall is small, but please, rest here in the shade.”

Without saying much more, he offered them dry bread and water. Rabban Bar Sauma and Markos tried to decline, but Li Wei just smiled and said, “I don’t need anything in return.”

Moved beyond words, Rabban drew from his pouch the little rusty steel cross that had travelled with him. He pressed it into Li Wei’s hand. “May this remind us of each other,” he said. Li Wei accepted it with a bow. Strengthened, the pilgrims continued west.

War later closed the road to Jerusalem, yet new paths opened: Markos rose to become Patriarch of the Eastern Church, and Rabban was chosen as an envoy to the courts of Europe. He stood before emperors in Constantinople, popes in Rome, kings in Paris and London, carrying messages of peace across a divided world. He died in Baghdad in 1294, but the light of his journey endured.

“Back in Kashgar, Li Wei kept the cross safe. His wife later embroidered the symbols onto an old silk scarf. The scarf and cross passed quietly through the family, until they reached this small house on the edge of an old road.” Grandmother Li finished the story.

Xiaolian, traumatised by the story, traced the worn edges with her thumb. She could feel the weight of deserts and mountains. She could sense strangers who would become connected by one shared meal.

Years passed. Xiaolian grew into a skilled weaver whose scarves travelled far beyond the village. She never sold the original scarf or the cross. They stayed with her at all times.

One spring evening, long after Grandmother Li had passed, an elderly foreign visitor arrived at Xiaolian’s door. He was dressed in simple clothes, and spoke Chinese with a strange accent. In his hand, he carried a small wooden box.

He introduced himself as Father Elias, a scholar tracing the footsteps of Rabban Bar Sauma. Word of Xiaolian’s scarves bearing symbols no Chinese artisan should have known had reached him over continents.

He opened the box slowly and revealed a small rusty steel cross, identical in every detail to the one Xiaolian had.

“This,” he said, “was found among Rabban Bar Sauma’s few possessions in Baghdad. It was believed to have a companion piece, one that he gave away during his journey”

He had come, he explained, to see if the lost twin still existed.

Xiaolian’s heart skipped a beat. The memories of Grandmother Li, her Nainai, came flashing back. Xiaolian drew her cross from its hiding place. The two pieces lay side by side on the table, gleaming softly.

Father Elias’s eyes filled with tears. “The circle,” he whispered, “is complete.”

Xiaolian understood then that the threads had never been about one act of kindness in a dusty market. They were about two strangers who could meet again and recognise each other across time.

“Take it home,” she said, “the road is long, and kindness is lighter to carry when shared.”

That night, under the same stars that once guided Rabban westward, Xiaolian sat at her loom once more. The shuttle began its quiet song, weaving new patterns into the endless threads of connection.

Creative Writing: Fiction – Group 2 WINNER

The Journey of Wind and Sand

Alliance Primary School, Kowloon Tong, Lau Wang Hei – 10

The wind tasted of red dust when Jun stood at the edge of Dunhuang. In front of him stretched the desert—so wide he couldn't see its end. Under the blue sky, the sand moved like golden waves. Jun was fourteen, but his dream was big: to follow the old Silk Road and find the Valley of Wind Chimes. His father, a mapmaker, had once told him about it—where wind and stone made music together.

When Jun was ten, his father died, leaving behind a few unfinished maps covered in strange curved lines and symbols. On the morning Jun left home, he packed one of these maps, a small compass, a wooden flute, and some food. His mother gave him a scarf and said softly, “The road will not give you answers quickly, but it will help you know who you are.”

Soon Dunhuang disappeared into the distance. The days burned like fire, and the air shimmered over the dunes. At night, the desert froze. Jun wrapped himself in the scarf and watched the stars. One night, a gust of wind whispered through the dunes—it almost sounded like a voice saying, “Keep going east.”

After a week, Jun reached a caravan camp filled with traders from distant lands—Persians with blue eyes, Kazakh horsemen, and Chinese merchants with silk and spices. He asked to join them, offering to care for camels. The caravan leader, Zahra, eyed him skeptically.

“You are too small to handle camels,” she said.

“I can read maps,” Jun replied.

“Then tomorrow, map boy, find us water.”

At dawn, Jun studied his father's map and the dunes. Climbing a rocky hill, he spotted a patch of green in the distance—reeds around a small pool. Zahra nodded in approval. “You can stay with us.”

Travelling with the caravan changed Jun. He learned to listen—to the bells around the camels' necks, the movement of stars, and the low hum of the desert at night. Around the fire, traders told stories of faraway cities—Samarkand's blue domes, Kashgar's markets, and snowy mountains shining in the sun. These tales filled Jun with wonder.

One evening, Zahra sat beside him. “You carry something important, don't you?”

Jun showed her the map. “My father drew this. He said it leads to the Valley of Wind Chimes.”

Zahra's eyes softened. “I've heard of that place. They say the wind sings there through tall stone pillars like bells. Only those who truly listen can find it.”

Weeks passed. The caravan battled sandstorms and crossed narrow mountain trails, passing ruins half-buried in dust. When they reached Turpan, Jun decided to go on alone. Zahra gave him a small bag of dates. “Trust,” she said.

From Turpan, Jun entered Tuyugou Valley, where red cliffs rose high with caves carved into their sides. Inside were ancient Buddhist paintings—the faces of Buddhas glowing faintly in the dim light. They seemed to watch him as he walked past. Villagers told him the Valley of Wind Chimes was only a legend, but Jun would not give up.

As the air turned cold and snow began to fall, Jun grew weak. One freezing night, he took shelter in an old watchtower and lit a small fire. To stay awake, he played his father's favorite tune on the flute—a slow, wistful melody like wind between stones.

Then he heard it: ding... ding... ding...

At first it seemed an echo—but the notes came from outside. Heart pounding, Jun followed the sound through a narrow path between cliffs. Suddenly the passage opened into a hidden valley. Under the moonlight stood tall stone pillars, thin and smooth. When the wind blew, they rang like wind chimes, their tones weaving together in a haunting, beautiful song.

Jun opened his father's map. Now he understood. The strange symbols showed the pillars' positions and how their shadows fell. His father hadn't sought gold or glory—he had been mapping the music of the desert.

Jun sat among the chimes until dawn, the wind singing around him. He felt as if his father was beside him, listening too. "I found it, Father," he whispered.

Months later, Jun returned to Dunhuang—taller, leaner, and weathered by wind and sun. His mother recognized him instantly. She listened as he spoke of Zahra, the caravan, and the valley of singing stones. She cried softly, smiling through her tears.

"Your father always said maps are more than lines," she told him. "They are journeys waiting for the brave."

When Jun grew up, he became a mapmaker like his father. But his maps were not ordinary—they showed more than rivers and mountains. He also marked the places where he had heard special sounds, met kind people, and learned important truths. People said his maps felt alive. Some swore that if you touched them, you could hear a faint humming—like wind moving over distant sand.

On quiet nights, when the wind rose from the desert, Jun took out his flute and played the song of the valley. The notes drifted through Dunhuang's streets, mingling with the whisper of sand. Together they became a single melody—one that travelled forever along the old Silk Road, carrying the story of a boy, a mapmaker, and the voice of the wind.

Creative Writing: Fiction – Group 3 WINNER

Ethan and Bolt's Revenge Caravan

HD Beijing School, Kimi Sun – 11

In a sunbaked village clinging to the Tianshan Mountains' foothills, 12-year-old Ethan lived in a mud-brick hut with his sick father Mustafa and loyal golden retriever Bolt. Mustafa, once a seasoned Silk Road camel driver, lay bedridden with a stubborn lung disease—local herbs did nothing, and the only doctor who could help demanded gold Ethan didn't have. Their savings were drained, their goats sold one by one for medicine, and Ethan's mother's absence left no heirlooms to trade.

Each night, Ethan tended to his father, wiping his fevered forehead with cool cloths as Mustafa whispered tales of his travels. "Remember the oasis with date palms taller than watchtowers?" Mustafa would say, his voice thin but warm. "Silk softer than clouds, stars bright enough to touch." Ethan would cling to these words, asking, "Will we see it together?" Mustafa would brush his cheek, saying, "Bravery isn't fearlessness—it's doing what's right when you're scared. Love is courage with nowhere to hide."

One evening, Mustafa's cough worsened, leaving him gasping for breath. Ethan squeezed his hand, tears burning: "I'll get the gold, Dad. I promise." Mustafa smiled weakly: "Take my old knife—grip it firm but gentle, only to protect. Follow the North Star; it will guide you home, just as it guided me."

At dawn, Ethan packed flatbread, water, and the worn knife, then hurried to the village well—where he'd heard a caravan led by Karim was heading west for Antioch, needing extra hands. Bolt trotted beside him, sensing his urgency.

Karim frowned when he saw Ethan: "You're a boy. Sandstorms, hunger, Xionnu raiders—you'll die." "I'm strong!" Ethan insisted. "I tend camels, carry loads, use a knife. My dad's dying—this is his only chance." Karim studied his determined face, then nodded: "Stay close. Keep that dog—he might sense danger." "His name's Bolt," Ethan said. "He'll never leave me."

A curly-haired man named Jamil clapped Ethan's shoulder as they set off: "I left my 10-year-old in Baghdad for school. The Silk Road takes much, but gives back if you're brave." The caravan—50 silk-laden camels, 20 armed men, Ethan, and Bolt—plodded west, bells ringing softly.

The first days were peaceful. Karim taught Ethan to read the stars: "The North Star never moves—your father was right to trust it." Jamil warned him: "Xionnu attack at dawn or dusk. They fear dogs—Bolt's barks will warn us." Bolt wagged his tail, as if understanding.

A week later, they entered the Gobi Desert. The sun blazed, sand scorching underfoot, and water grew scarce. "Ration carefully—no water for two days," Karim ordered. Ethan shared his canteen with Bolt, whispering, "We'll get through this together." That night, Ethan worried aloud about his father. Jamil reassured him: "Fathers fight for their sons. Your dad's holding on for you—love is stronger than any medicine."

On the tenth day, arrows hailed from mountain cliffs. “Xionnu!” someone shouted. Camels panicked, raiders on horseback charging down with swords. “Defend the silk!” Karim yelled. Jamil pulled Ethan behind a rock: “Stick to me—watch my back!”

A horned raider lunged at Ethan. Bolt barked, leaping at the horse’s legs. The raider fell, and Jamil shouted: “Now!” Ethan gripped his father’s knife and stabbed the man’s leg. Another raider grabbed Ethan from behind—Bolt bit his arm, and Ethan rolled free. “Behind you!” he yelled to Karim, who sliced the enemy’s sword away.

After an hour, the Xionnu fled. Three men were wounded, two camels dead. Jamil bandaged Ethan’s cut arm: “You fought bravely.” Ethan trembled: “I was scared, but I couldn’t let Dad down.” Karim patted his shoulder: “Bravery is fighting even when you’re afraid. Your father would be proud.”

That night, Karim told the men Ethan’s story. They passed him extra bread and spices: “For your father,” one said, handing him cinnamon. “It eases coughs.” Ethan teared up: “I couldn’t have done it without Bolt... or any of you.”

The rest of the journey was tough but safer. Bolt found paths through snow-capped mountains, his nose sniffing out hidden trails. At an oasis, a merchant gave Ethan dates: “Tell your father a stranger wishes him well.”

A month later, they reached Antioch—bustling stone streets, markets filled with travelers. Karim sold the silk and handed Ethan a heavy pouch: “Enough for your father’s medicine—and more. You earned it.” Ethan hugged Jamil goodbye: “I’ll tell Dad you said hello.”

Ethan and Bolt raced back, following the North Star. When they reached the hut, Mustafa sat up in bed, cheeks pink, eyes bright. “Ethan!” he cried. Ethan hugged him, pouring out the gold. “I’m home, Dad! Bolt saved me, and the caravan men helped so much.” Mustafa cried: “My brave boy. I knew the stars would guide you.”

The doctor arrived, and within a month, Mustafa walked again. Each night, Ethan told stories of sandstorms, battles, and kind strangers. “Bolt’s a hero,” he said. Mustafa patted the dog: “Loyal, just like you.”

Months later, they joined Karim’s caravan again. “The Silk Road gave us a second chance,” Mustafa said. “Now we’ll help others—carry medicine, share food with lost travelers.”

As they set off, Ethan looked up at the North Star, Bolt at his side, father beside him. The wind carried the scent of silk and spices, and he smiled. The Silk Road had turned silk into gold, but it had given Ethan something far more precious: courage to face fear, loyalty of friends, and a father’s unshakable belief. No matter where the road led, he knew he’d always find his way home.

Fiction – Group 4 WINNER

The Connecting Thread

Pui Kiu College, Li Yu Yin Icy – 16

*“My darling, I have much to say
Where o precious one shall I begin?
All that is in you is princely
O you who makes of my words through their meaning
Cocoons of silk”*

—Nizar Qabbani

My name is Noah, and I was the first. They speak of the Silk Road now, a grand name for a thread of dust and longing that stitches the world together. They talk of caravans groaning with spices and jade, of empires whispering to one another across the scorching deserts and forbidding mountain passes. But before it was a road, before it was silk, it was my path to her. Before it was a route of trade, it was a monument to our separation.

Her name was Luna, and she was a weaver's daughter. To say only that, however, is to call the symphony a noise. She was an alchemist of silence and motion. In her father's workshop, filled with the gentle clatter of the loom and the faint, mulberry-sweet scent of the silkworms' feast, she performed her quiet miracles. She could take the frantic, blind spinning of the silkworm—that tiny creature's entire life's purpose, a tomb of its own making—and through a process of gentle steaming, patient unraveling in warm water, and the steady, rhythmic spin of the wheel, transform it. In her hands, that solitary cocoon became a shimmering testament to light, a filament so fine and strong it seemed spun from moonlight itself.

I, by contrast, was a mapmaker's son. My world was one of parchment and ink, of imagined lines and theoretical frontiers. I drew the jagged teeth of mountains I had never felt under my boots, charted the serpentine courses of rivers whose songs I had never heard. My father, a practical man, said we were unsuited. "She deals in tangible truth, son," he would say, tapping a finger on my latest drawing, "in the weight of thread and the warmth of cloth. You deal in unreachable lines, in the ghosts of places."

But he was wrong. We both dealt in metamorphosis. She took the internal and made it external—the worm's silent struggle into sublime, visible cloth. I took the external and made it internal—the vast, unknowable world into an image the mind could hold. We met in the space between these two acts, in the mulberry grove behind her home, where the air was thick and sweet, and the light fell through the leaves in dappled coins of gold.

"Why draw what you cannot see, Noah?" she asked me one evening, her fingers stained a permanent, faint green from the leaves she tirelessly harvested.

"For the same reason you weave what you cannot keep," I replied, my gaze tracing the way the sunset gilded her profile. "Is the beauty not in the act itself? The map is not the land, just as the silk is not the worm. They are both what remains after the struggle is over. A record of a transformation."

She looked at me then, a deep, measuring look that seemed to see past my eyes and into the very contours of my soul. Without a word, she reached into the fold of her tunic and handed me a small, finished piece of silk, a plain, unadorned square, cool and impossibly soft against my work-roughened palm. "Then this," she said, her voice barely a whisper, "is the record of my struggle today. Keep it."

It was the first thing she ever gave me. I understood it was not a gift of an object, but a gift of her effort, her time, her silent, focused self. It was the most profound gift I had ever received.

Then the Emperor's decree came, a scroll borne on imperial parchment that felt cold as stone. He needed a path to the West—a stable route through the deadly Taklamakan Desert and over the icy shoulders of the Pamir Mountains. The task fell to my aged father, and I knew with a sickening certainty it was a death sentence for a man whose eyes were clouding with age and whose heart was weary.

That night, in our mulberry grove, the air heavy with the scent of impending rain, I told Luna I would refuse the Emperor. I would not leave her.

"You must go," she said, her voice fierce with determination. "Your father cannot. And your drawings... they must become real. They must be tested against the wind and the stone. This is your purpose."

"My purpose is here, with you," I pleaded, the words tearing from a heart that felt like it was cracking open. "You are my wholly world."

"No," she whispered, her hand finding mine, her grip strong and sure. "Your purpose is to see the world. My purpose is to preserve the spirit. If you go, your seeing will have meaning. And my creation..." She paused, drawing a small, folded square of silk from her sleeve. "My creation will have a story behind it."

She unfolded it. It was not a picture of us together. It was a simple, profound symbol: the Yin and Yang, the two swirling halves of a single whole, but pulled apart, separated to opposite edges of the white silk. A single, shimmering thread of the deepest blue connected them, spanning the empty space between.

"Our love will be this thread, Noah," she said, her eyes holding mine, refusing to let me look away from the truth of it. "Your journey is the pulling apart. My life here will be the act of holding my end of the thread taut. This separation is not a break. It is a tension. And tension," she insisted, her voice dropping to a whisper, "is what gives the loom its power. It is what allows the cloth to be woven."

*"Come, I will make the continent indissoluble,
I will make the most splendid race the sun ever shone upon,
I will make divine magnetic lands,
With the love of comrades,
With the life-long love of comrades."*

— Walt Whitman

I finally understood. She was not sending me away. We were beginning a new, larger work together. Our love was not ending; it was being stretched across a grander loom.

The journey was a hell of sand and stone. The desert was a vast, yellow void that whispered lies and tried to swallow all hope, scouring our skin and our sanity with blasts of grit. The mountains were unforgiving giants of granite and ice that scorned our fragile human warmth. I was no heroic explorer; I was a terrified man, leading a band of skeptical soldiers and avaricious traders who muttered my name like a curse with every misstep. I missed Luna with a physical pain, a hollow ache in my chest that was my most constant companion.

But in my darkest moments, huddled in a tent while the wind screamed outside, I would take out the square of silk. I did not look at it to remember the softness of her cheek or the sound of her laugh. I looked at it to remember the purpose. The tension in that embroidered thread was the very tension in my soul. My loneliness was one half of the symbol; her steadfast life back home was the other. The thread between us was not a memory; it was a live, taut cable of shared intention. My journey was giving meaning to her stillness, and her waiting was giving purpose to my wandering.

After two years of unimaginable hardship, we reached the Ferghana Valley in the West. I saw its legendary "heavenly horses," creatures of thunder and dust, and met people with eyes the colour of summer sky and rich earth. I tasted wines that burned with unfamiliar spices and heard music played on strange instruments that felt both alien and deeply familiar, as if recalling a dream. With every new sight meticulously recorded on my maps, I thought, "This is for the Emperor." But deeper down, in the silent, secret chamber of my heart, I knew, "This is for Luna. This is a new colour, a new texture for the grand cloth we are weaving together."

As I returned, a man aged far beyond his years, the Emperor praised my maps as works of genius. The court celebrated me as a hero. But my heart, a single-minded homing pigeon, was racing toward one thing only: the mulberry grove.

I went to her home, my boots still caked with the dust of a continent. The loom in the corner was silent, shrouded in a fine layer of dust. Her father, now a stooped and ancient man, looked at me with a pity so profound it stole the air from my lungs.

"Noah," he said, his voice raspy with regret. "You are too late."

My world stopped on its axis.

"A powerful lord saw her in the market a year after you left. He was captivated. He offered her a life of comfort, of status... We... I... encouraged her. We thought you were lost to the desert, a ghost in the sand. Her heart... it was broken by the silence. She agreed."

She was married. She lived in the splendid isolation of the capital.

I was destroyed. The great achievement of my life, the road I had bled for, felt like a gaping wound, a monument to my failure. I had crossed a continent to build a future for us, and that future had vanished while I was away building its path. I fell into a deep despair, a ghost at the very court that celebrated me, believing the thread had finally, cruelly, snapped.

*"I measure every Grief I meet
With narrow, probing, Eyes –
I wonder if It weighs like Mine –
Or has an Easier size."*

– Emily Dickinson

For months, I moved through my life like a shadow. Then, a Western merchant from the very routes I had charted came to court, presenting gifts to the Emperor. Among the trinkets of gold and jars of spice was a bolt of woollen cloth, woven with a stunning, complex pattern of interlocking beasts and spirals. The court murmured, admiring its vibrant, foreign dyes.

But my eye, trained to see underlying structures, saw the pattern beneath the patterns. It was the same one: the two halves, separated, connected by a single, unbreakable thread woven into the very foundation of the design.

My heart slammed against my ribs. I pushed through the crowd of courtiers. "This pattern!" I demanded, my voice too loud for the decorous hall. "Where did it come from?"

The merchant, startled, explained. It came from a trading post in the West, a place I had helped establish. It was taught to them by a foreign woman, a Chinese lady of high status who had traveled there with her husband. She called the pattern "The Connecting Thread."

In that moment, the truth crashed over me not like a wave, but like a sunrise—a slow, dawning, glorious light. The thread had not broken. Luna had not given up. She had taken her new life, her new position of influence, and she had used it to send our message back down the very road I had created. She had not accepted the end of our story; she had woven its essence into the fabric of the world, sending it back to me like a homing beacon. Our connection had not been broken by her marriage; it had been transformed, scaled into something larger than the two of us.

I requested an immediate audience with the Emperor.

"Your Majesty," I said, my voice clear and strong with a conviction I had not felt since I last stood in the mulberry grove. "The road is open. But a road is just dirt until it is given a soul. Let us send our silk, our greatest beauty. But let us also send the seeds of the mulberry tree and the knowledge of how to nurture the worm. Let us send our poets and our philosophers. And let us ask for their knowledge, their medicines, their astronomy in return. Let this road be a loom, and let our cultures be the threads. Let us weave a tapestry of understanding between East and West, so that no two hearts need ever be fully separated by silence again."

The Emperor, a man who understood the power of symbols, agreed. The Silk Road, as a true exchange of spirit and substance, was born.

The first caravan was loaded not just with bales of silk, but with seeds, scrolls of poetry, and delicate artworks. And at the very top of the most important chest, I placed Luna's original square of silk. Let it be the first official item to travel the entire, formalized road. Let it go back to her, a message that I had finally, fully understood the lesson of the loom.

I did not go to find her, to disrupt her life. Our work was done. We had held the tension. We had proven that a personal love could become a bridge for all of humanity.

I saw her only once more, by chance, in a palace garden years later. She was serene, a woman of grace and quiet power. There were no tears, no recriminations, no need for dramatic words.

"You see," she said softly, her eyes holding the same deep light I remembered.

"The thread held."

"It did," I replied, my voice thick with a peace that passeth all understanding.

"It became stronger and more beautiful than we ever imagined."

We smiled, two old friends, two collaborators who had built a world between them. Then we turned and parted, for the final time, our shared work complete.

The lesson of the Silk Road is not that love means staying together. The lesson is that true love can sometimes mean being pulled apart for a higher purpose. The silkworm must be undone, separated from its cocoon, to become silk. The idea must leave its birthplace to become wisdom. Luna and I learned that love is not a circle that encloses two people. It is a thread that can connect worlds. Our personal, private love was the first strand. We sacrificed its small, comfortable form so that it could become the foundational thread upon which a thousand other connections were made—of trade, of art, of ideas, of peace.

And that is the true meaning of the Silk Road. It is the story of how a man and a woman, separated by a continent and the dictates of fate, discovered that their love was not diminished by distance. It was amplified. It became a road. And a road, once open, allows everyone to journey, to share, and to understand that we are all connected by countless, invisible threads of shared hope, enduring beauty, and common humanity. Our personal sadness was real, but it was the necessary loom on which a greater, universal joy was woven.

*Our two hearts were separated,
A pull that felt like fate,
But our lonely, woven thread of love
Became a continent's gate.
For the silk must leave the cocoon to fly,
To make the world we name home.*

Creative Writing: Fiction – Group 4 WINNER

The Wind on the Taklamakan Sings of Silk

Po Leung Kuk No. 1 W.H. Cheung College, Ma Tsz Ho Cyrus – 15

The song of the Taklamakan is older than empires. It is a low, mournful drone, sweeping across the sea of singing sands, a chorus of a million polished grains recounting journeys of thirst, ambition, and bones. To live on its edge, as my family has for generations, is to learn the wind's many tongues: the hiss of a sand-serpent's approach, the shriek of a dying storm, and, most precious of all, the deep, rhythmic sigh that heralds the caravan.

My name is Liang, and I am the keeper of the White Horse Inn. It is not an inn of timber and comfort, but a fortress of stubborn, sun-baked earth; a clenched fist of civilization raised against the desert's yawn. From our parapet, I have watched the pulse of the world's artery for thirty years. The Silk Road is not a road. It is a living, breathing organism—a sprawling, fragile nervous system connecting the forehead of the world to its toes. Its lifeblood is not just silk, but jade and Buddhism, stirrups and saffron, glass and grief, all borne on the swaying, patient humps of Bactrian camels.

My own blood is its map. My grandfather's grandfather was a guard from Chang'an, a man of the Tang army's proud cavalry, assigned to protect a train of tribute. In Khotan, the City of Jade, he saw a weaver's daughter drawing water from a well, her movements as fluid as the silk she spun. He deserted his post, his horse, his very name, for that grace. I am the product of that choice, a man of both garrison and oasis, my face etched by the same sun that gilds the Buddha of Bamiyan.

The pulse came at the bruised hour before dusk, when the desert bleeds from gold to violet. The dust cloud was small, struggling. I rang the great bronze bell, its voice a dull, welcoming thunder against the wind's whine. My sons, Bao and Jun, rushed to man the great wooden gates, while my wife, Mei, stoked the central fire and set the great iron kettle to boil.

They staggered in—a dozen men and three dozen camels, all reduced to one trembling organism of exhaustion. The camels' groans were like rusted hinges. The men's eyes were hollow, scoured clean by the sand. They were Sogdians, the legendary traders of the Road, their once-vibrant tunics faded to the color of dust. At their center, a figure smaller than the rest, swathed in a travel-stained chador, slumped against a camel's flank. It was a woman. As her attendants helped her down, she clutched a wooden crate, not with the carefulness of a merchant guarding treasure, but with the visceral, animal desperation of a mother clutching her last child.

They revived mutton broth and millet wine. The caravan master, a man named Anahid with a beard like a thorn bush, bowed his thanks. “The desert tried to claim us, Keeper Liang. The spirits of the dunes were hungry this season.”

“The desert is always hungry,” I replied, my eyes drifting to the woman. She had removed her outer veil, revealing a face not young, but fiercely compelling. High cheekbones spoke of Persian plateaus, but her eyes—a startling hazel-green, like moss on a wet stone—held a depth that was entirely her own. She sat apart, the crate on her lap.

“She is Farima,” Anahid said, following my gaze, his voice dropping. “A glassblower from Samarkand. She does not trade in trinkets. She carries a single piece, and she seeks not a market, but a man.”

I brought her a cup of hot tea. She accepted it with a nod, her fingers long and delicate, yet marked by old, silvery burns—the kisses of her craft.

“You seek a man?” I asked.

“I seek the Eastern Star,” she said. Her voice was husky, scraped raw by the desert, yet melodious. “In Luoyang. They say he can weave the clouds into tapestries and trap the sound of rivers in brocade.”

“The master weaver. I have heard the tales. They say his silks are so fine, they can be drawn through a wedding ring.”

A ghost with a smile touched her lips. “I do not seek fineness. I seek a conversation.”

That night, in the fire-lit privacy of my own quarters, she opened the crate. It was lined with raw, unspun silk, and nestled within was an object wrapped in faded blue linen. With reverence that was almost religious, she unfolded the cloth.

The air left my lungs.

It was an ewer, perhaps a foot tall. Its form was elegantly simple, echoing the amphorae of the Romans, but its substance was a miracle. It was glass, but of a blue so profound, it seemed like a piece of the evening sky just after sunset, captured and given form. This alone would have made it priceless. But within the very heart of the glass, swirling as if caught in a slow, eternal vortex, were filaments of pure, radiant gold. They were not painted on, nor laid in. They were entirely within, born of the molten glass itself, moving through the blue like celestial bodies in a midnight firmament.

“They call it ‘naqsh-i-zarr’—the pattern of gold,” Farima whispered, her eyes reflecting the dancing firelight in the blue surface. “The secret is in the breath and the fire. The gold is not thread. It is... an idea given substance. A dream made solid.” Her hand hovered over it, not touching. “The Eastern Star weaves stories. I blow visions. I believe they are the same language, spoken in different materials. My glass must speak to his silk.”

Her quest was not commerce, but communion. A shiver, not of cold, but of recognition, went through me. This was the true magic of the Road: not the transport of goods, but the collision of genius, the desperate, human need to have one’s deepest vision understood by another soul across the chasm of the world.

“The path to Luoyang from here is the most dangerous,” I said. “The Pamir Mountains. The Roof of the World. My life has been sand and sun. But my father’s father was a soldier of the High Pass. I know the stories. I will guide you.”

We joined a larger, more diverse train assembling at the foot of the Pamirs. Here, the Silk Road revealed its true tapestry. There was Leo, a burly, red-faced Byzantine with a laugh like

falling rocks, guarding his bolts of purple damask woven with silver gryphons—cloth fit for an emperor's shroud. There was Rashid, a Persian scholar-turned-merchant, his camel laden not with spices but with rolled papyri and vellum, texts on astronomy and medicine. There were taciturn Uighur horsemen, their bows strapped to their saddles; Tibetan traders with lumps of raw turquoise; and a small, serene party of Buddhist monks from Gandhara, carrying a sealed reliquary and hearts full of quiet prayer.

We ascended, and the world transformed. The relentless, baking yellow gave way to a brutal, sublime geometry of grey rock and blinding white. The air grew thin and sharp as a newly honed knife. Our breath plumed in the eternal chill. The camels, desert kings, became clumsy and fearful. We were ants crawling across the ribcage of a slumbering, stone giant. Men spoke in hushed tones of the spirits of the peaks, of yeti that walked like men, and of passes that could close with a sigh, burying travelers for a thousand years.

Farima's glass ewer traveled in its crate, now padded with wool and held in a specially slung basket. She watched it constantly, her worry a silent companion. Leo the Byzantine would often ride beside her, regaling her with boisterous tales of the Hippodrome and the scheming bishops of Constantinople, his Greek-accented Persian a comical, warm sound in the sterile air.

Ten days into the mountains, the disaster struck.

It was on a narrow traverse, a path no wider than two camels, with a sheer wall of ice on one side and a void that drank the light on the other. A sudden, sharp crack, louder than thunder, split the air. A ledge of ancient ice, hidden under a fresh dusting of snow, gave way beneath the feet of Leo's lead yak. The beast bellowed in terror, its legs scrambling at nothing, and plunged into the abyss, the sound of its fall swallowed instantly by the vastness. The yak behind it stumbled, its leg snapping with a sickening crunch. It collapsed, blocking the path, and the precious load on its back—six bolts of that legendary Byzantine damask—burst from their bindings. The wind, that cruel artist of the heights, snatched at them. For a surreal, horrifying moment, the most expensive cloth in the world danced in the void like gaudy ghosts, before fluttering down, snagging on rocks a hundred feet below, lost to all recovery.

The column lurched to a halt. Leo stood frozen, his red face bleached to the color of parchment. He did not scream. He made a small, choked sound, like a wounded animal. He sank to his knees in the snow, his great shoulders shaking. That damask was not just his fortune; it was his legacy, his promise to his guild, the fruit of a year's perilous journey. Its loss was absolute ruin, a sentence of debt and disgrace.

The silence that followed was heavier than the mountains. The law of the Road was clear: you were responsible for your own. To stop was to risk everyone. To help was often impossible. We would have to move the injured yak, leave Leo with what supplies we could spare, and continue. It was the arithmetic of survival.

Then, Farima moved.

She slid from her camel; her movements deliberate in the deep snow. She walked to where Leo knelt, the crate containing her life's masterpiece in her hands. She did not speak. She simply knelt before him, placed the crate in the snow, and opened it. She unwrapped the blue linen, and lifted the ewer into the thin, crystalline light.

The effect was staggering. Against the monochrome brutality of the ice and rock, the vessel's deep, vibrant blue was a shocking, almost painful proclamation of beauty. The trapped gold filaments blazed, capturing the high-altitude sun, seeming to swirl with an inner fire. It was a piece of another, more generous world.

“Take this,” Farima said, her voice clear and calm in the absolute silence. “In Kashgar, at the western market, show it to the headman of the glass-sellers’ guild. His name is Yusuf. He knows its worth. It will cover the loss of your damask twice over.”

Leo stared, uncomprehending. His eyes, bleary with despair, shifted from the glorious object to Farima’s serene face. “What... what trick is this?” he stammered. “This is your soul you hold. I cannot...”

“It is glass,” she said, though the word was a blasphemy against its glory. “It is replaceable.”

“You do not know me!” Leo cried, a sob breaking through. “I am a stranger from a strange land! My god is not your god!”

Farima reached out and placed a hand, scarred by fire, on his fur-clad arm. “The Road knows you,” she said, and her words seemed to hang in the frozen air, a new kind of law. “We are all its children. If the artery breaks for one, the lifeblood fails for all. This is not charity. It is preservation.”

I watched, and I felt the understanding ripple through the column—the Uighur horsemen, the Tibetan traders, the silent monks. In that moment, the true cargo of the Silk Road was unveiled. It was not the silk, nor the glass, nor the spices. It was trust. A fragile, threadbare, and absolutely vital fabric woven from a million such choices. It was the unspoken oath that a Sogdian’s word would be honored in a Chang’an counting-house, that a Nestorian Christian would find shelter in a Buddhist cave-temple, that a woman from Samarkand would sacrifice her dream to save the dream of a man from Constantinople.

Leo, wordless, took the ewer. He cradled it with a tenderness he might give an infant. The transaction was complete, but it was not a purchase; it was a covenant.

The journey resumed. The mood had shifted. We were no longer a collection of individuals, but a single organism. The monks shared their meager rations more freely. Rashid the scholar tended to the injured yak with his knowledge of animal medicine. The Uighurs took point, scouting the path with renewed vigilance. Farima now rode with an empty basket, but her head was held higher than ever.

Weeks later, we descended from the realm of stone and ice into the verdant, humid embrace of the Hexi Corridor, and finally, to the Eternal City of Luoyang. The noise was an assault—the din of a million lives, the clamor of markets, the scent of mud, spice, sewage, and incense. After the purity of the mountains, it was overwhelming.

The Eastern Star’s studio was not a grand hall, but a quiet, airy compound near the river, shaded by ancient ginkgo trees. The sound here was the soft, rhythmic clack-clack-clack of a dozen looms. We were led into a sunlit room where the master sat before a simple, yet magnificent, draw-loom.

He was ancient, his face a landscape of gentle wrinkles, but his eyes were the keen, black eyes of a songbird. He did not look at us, but at the work before him. Farima stood, silent, waiting. She had not brought her glass; she had brought only herself, and the story.

After a long while, he spoke without turning. “The mountains are in your eyes, and the desert is on your skin. You have come far to watch an old man weave.”

“I have come,” Farima said, “to hear a story I have seen only in blue and gold.”

The Eastern Star nodded slowly. He gestured to a bolt of cloth resting on a low table. “Unroll it.”

Farima stepped forward. She unbound the silk, and as it spilled across the floor, a soft gasp escaped her. It was the exact, profound blue of her ewer. And woven into it, in threads of gold so fine they seemed mere suggestions of light, was a pattern. Not of flowers or dragons, but of constellations—the specific, swirling arrangement of the night sky as seen from the deserts of Samarkand in the month of Farvardin. It was her vision. It was the firmament within her glass, translated into thread.

“A caravan master from Kashgar, a man named Yusuf, passed through many moons ago,” the weaver said softly. “He spoke of a glassblower who had perfected the breath of the fire dragon. He described the sky she held in her hands. I have been trying to catch its echo ever since.”

Tears, clean and quiet, traced paths through the dust on Farima’s cheeks. No money was exchanged. No contracts were drawn. The weaver handed her the bolt of silk. She bowed, deeper than I had ever seen her bow to anyone. In return, she produced from her pouch a small, rough lump of uncut cobalt—the raw material from which her blue was born—and placed it in his hand.

They had conversed. Across three thousand miles of desert, mountain, and steppe, through the medium of fire and thread, they had completed a sentence begun by the wind itself.

I returned to the White Horse Inn, to the song of the Taklamakan. Leo’s damask was lost, but his name was now spoken with respect from Kashgar to Constantinople. Farima’s ewer graced the altar of a great cathedral, they say, holding holy water. Her new work, infused with the spirit of the Eastern Star’s silk, made her the glassblower to caliphs and khans.

I still watch the artery pulse. I see the silks and the spices, the horses and the ideas. But I see with new eyes. The greatest treasure is weightless, invisible, and carried in the human heart. It is the trust that turns a collection of strangers into a caravan. It is the courage to offer your masterpiece to a broken man on a frozen pass. It is the faith that someone, somewhere, will understand the language of your dream.

The wind sings of many things. But if you listen closely, beneath the tales of gold and bones, you can hear the true, enduring melody: the soft, resilient, golden thread of trust, weaving East to West, past to future, one fragile, human choice at a time. And that, I now know, is the song that never ends.

Fiction – Group 5 WINNER

The Kingdom of None

International Christian School, Leung Lap Yan Leanne – 16

A horde of travelers rode their camels across the barren terrain, with goods that could turn a beggar into an aristocrat strapped to their weary backs. They came back and forth, some wearing different garments than others, speaking in different tongues, but they always came back. Through the vast desert to the mountains, they trekked; it was this path they used to bring honor and wealth to their country. It was my path they treasured and sought out. The familiar sound of hooves trotting along sandy roads that stretched endlessly was like music to my ears; an old Sogdian merchant and his trusty steed made their trek, this time with Ferghana horses instead of silk from the east. The way he trekked from one foot to another, to the rhythm of his breath, to the way he wrinkled his nose at a sudden gust of wind, and the tune he hummed to his camel, it was all committed in my memory, as was all other veteran travelers that took this road. The merchant made his trail he would continue to make until his last breath, while a phantom coin made its way into my coffer of power and glory.

The amount of silk and porcelain transported from one end to another were countless like the grains of sand along the path they traveled, the very grains that helped them improve their status in society. With all this help I offer, surely one should erect a statue in my honor? After all, I am the reason connectivity exists between the West and the East; I am the reason why cultures diffuse and why merchants become revered in their cities.

My attention jerked towards a new set of footsteps thudding against the Gobi. My lips curled when I realized it was a new traveler. A young merchant from Chang'an, hand gripped around the leash of his steed. The goods were wrapped around the poor camel's back by several layers of rope; someone was terrified of losing their only chance of making this trek worth it. How adorable. With a flick of a hand, a gust of wind surged from his back, propelling him with more comfort in the scorching sandy terrain. He could be another regular. Another trophy to add to my ever-expanding collection.

Chatter amongst scholars of different origins floated towards my ears from those caravanserais: Persian and Chinese scholars discussed and debated about the stars or numbers, or spoke with great passion about the deity they centered their society around. Some even handed each other gifts like it was a time of celebration. And all of it was possible through me. As I passed through a bustling caravanseirai, a snippet of a conversation floated to my ear.

"What is this you are carrying?" A scholar pointed at the rolled-up papers in a Tang scholar's hand as they sat across from each other in a caravanseirai.

"Oh, these are translated works from the Ancient Greeks about the stars."

"The stars?"

“Yes,” the scholar unfurled the works, fingers pointing at charts and texts as he rambled on about the findings from the people before them. All the while, the scholar across from him listened, asking questions or adding insight from his own region. Soon, many others joined, and the conversation echoed through the inn until the night. The next day, all scholars from different walks of life and regions left the caravanserai, enlightened with new knowledge, eager to share with their people. And all of that was possible through *me*.

I sneered at my brother, the one who championed sea trade in the Indian Ocean. He monitored the ships carrying *common* and fruitless commodities one could find in their backyard, while I oversaw the transport of luxury commodities that the richest vied to display and the poor vied to sell to survive. Any arguments from my brother fell on deaf ears; why should one care if goods were far more efficient, affordable, and safer by sea, when *profit* came knocking on the merchant's houses who traveled on my road?

The sounds of annoyance and frustration from these mortals brought a smile to my face as I sent a sandstorm to play in their ports. All their goods were probably ruined, and ships delayed or, even better, destroyed. “Let’s see you try and protect that.” I chortled.

In fact, people have sought to keep me alive and well. Genghis Khan and his descendants protected my path and enhanced its ability to provide, and profit flourished. I lived in luxury as much as the merchants who sold their country’s goods. People adored me. People needed me. I was the only thing keeping Eurasia connected via land that provided massive rewards with... minimal harm. Another coin falls into my pitless coffer when a traveler and their steed traverses the road, further investing into my power and might as the Road of All Roads. For decades, this rhythm that the travelers and I danced to was unbreakable. Until that fateful day.

Travelers visited like any ordinary day. Strange. Vermin and fleas swarmed them, unbeknownst to these feeble-minded travelers. No matter, all it shows is that pests adore and desire to experience the luxury and grandeur of my road.

Those travelers never returned. They must be staying in the city for a while. Perhaps migrated there. Surely any day will come when they will make their journey on my road again.

Another regular hoard of Persian merchants came. They were much more slender in build, a weary yet determined look plastered on their face. There were usually four that traveled together, but only two went on this journey. My path, crafted from thousands of merchants, grew cold. Abandoned by the people who discovered my magnificence. No. Perhaps they have retired.

The caravanserais went silent. One of the owners was slumped over, their corpse being the only resident in that now abandoned inn. Another owner had set up a sign in front of the inn. Closed? *Closed?* That owner had the same sickly look that plagued other travelers’ faces. They all looked like Death was knocking at their door. A few days later, that owner also became the only resident in that caravanserai.

Another band of travelers. I watched the sick-ridden man plead with his horse, begging the animal to move faster and pull the cart of soon-to-be corpses attached to them. The driver, with the same weary expression, gripped the leash as firmly as his strength allowed him to.

I whispered the same words of pleading, but formed a different prayer instead. “Please... make it to the next stop. Make it to the next city.” I did not wish for them to make it to the next city to make money and fuel my pride. I prayed they would make it to prove my road was still worth taking.

I reached out to the horse, straining to pull the cart that clashed with the sand. “Go on. Keep moving.” A flick of my wrist and a gust of wind carried the cart as far as the horse could move.

A hoof in front of another. A prayer from the driver’s lips.

I stared at the horse that took its eternal sleep, and the driver joined his steed, along with his family that had left the plane long since the journey began. I stared as sand covered the corpse, as if it never existed. I stared at the desert that once brought me fortune, and now only brings me corpses. I could only smell death when I used to be able to smell the tang of copper.

A decade passed before another band of travelers came with their horses. Instead of luxury goods being transported, only *common* goods were strapped to the back. I squinted my eyes and took a closer look at these travelers. They weren’t merchants. Desperate citizens trying to escape a fate I dare not face.

“Just a little further,” One of the travelers coughed, hunching over to relieve the itch in his throat. I widened my eyes, a chill passing through my spine. With a flick of my wrist, a gust of wind blew that traveler over, separating him and the poison he spat out away from the other travelers whose fate has not been written yet.

“Are you alright?” One of his companions rushed over to him, only to be blown away by another gust of wind. No. They were not getting sick. Death would not write their stories. Death would not determine the fate of my legacy. No, I was going to be the road that brought fortune and luxury to cities that used me, *not* the road that would be the Grim Reaper collecting its toll.

Those travelers never made it past the Taklaman. I could hear Death laughing in my head.

Since those travelers, none have come. The only sound that remained was of tumbleweeds being led by the wind across the barren lands. No more sounds of hooves pulling themselves up a mountain came to my ears.

For once, it was quiet.

I gritted my teeth, glaring at both the hubs residing in the west and the east as I hollered. “You fools! You dare leave?! I am the road that made you grow, I am the road that you *need* to grow! You cannot be done with me, you shall not be done with me! Send your men, send your horses! You can travel this road, you will travel this road!”

My cries echoed through the barren terrain, my only audience being the untrampled grains of sand. Somewhere, the roof of a caravanserai crumbled. A sand dune swallowed a worn-out path made by thousands of merchants. I stood there like a frozen statue, realization cementing the future I refused to play out.

They abandoned me.

The ones who once *used* my road to grow.

The ones who once *relied* on my road to grow.

They abandoned me.

“You cannot abandon me,” I whisper into the void. “You need me...You must! How else will you transport your goods? How else will you thrive? You cannot! You cannot... can... can you?”

No response. Not even my brother in the south responded. Simply watching. Pitying.

“Pax Mongolica, you swore to protect me! Where are you now?!”

The corpses infected with buboes did not answer.

They abandoned me.

And I was all alone.

I stood like a knight at a post, refusing to abandon my duty. This vast hollow terrain was once my territory. My kingdom that *invaders* used for their own benefit. “I am the one who made you who you are!” I sneered, laughing maniacally into the audience of none. “Bow down before me!”

This mirage echoed through the deserts and the mountains, of a prideful sneer emboldened even as the body was crippled, no longer useful. Inadequate.

The dust and sand settled, while the waves and winds roared. People still talked about the stars and numbers. Not because of me anymore. I was of no service.

The tune... what was that tune? I was desperate to recall the sound of the Sogdian merchant’s tune. How did it go? I listened to it regularly. I *knew* it. I knew it. The tune he used to calm and entertain his camel. I know that tune. I *can* remember it. I can remember it.

I fell to my knees, hands digging into the grains of sand that mocked me. I forgot that tune. And the joyful conversations of enlightenment and diffusion that occurred in those houses. All gone. All leaving me. Just like those merchants.

There I lay in my kingdom of none, the kingdom that *served* all yet was never served. My mirage echoed for no one to hear, for no one to remember the glory and the use I brought to Eurasia. All that remained was boundless and bare lands, and the road that was no longer taken.

An invasive, jarring drill violated the once peaceful grounds of the road, drawing me out of my slumber. The sound did not cease, but rather amplified. What was happening? I cringed at the distinct, overwhelming scent of metal instead of the traditional desert breeze. The same drilling sound erupted again, vibrating each grain of sand and hammering in my head. That wasn’t the sound of a merchant’s bell. No... it was much shriller. Irritating. What was happening? The warm and dull light of a campfire that brought a sense of warmth and camaraderie was replaced by a sterile, blinding spark of light that lit up the whole road. On top of all of that, chatter and footsteps echoed. People were here. Their faces were not grey nor sullen, and their builds neither slim nor crooked. *Healthy* people were here. On my road...hammering plates that glistened in the sunlight onto pillar after pillar, forming a highway made of inorganic metals. I snorted at that thought. The road existed, paved by travelers...travelers centuries ago.

Men with foreign tools were able to drill a hole through a mountain, where I witnessed travelers risk their lives to travel around; in fact, their corpses were not too far off from another metal pillar and a road with lines built on top. These men carried on with their task with an air of confidence and pragmatism, unlike merchants who were always checking behind their backs and carrying daggers with them on their camels. These men also traveled on a moving metal box, with circular plates spinning along with those lines from earlier. These metal boxes allowed the men to travel from one place to another in an hour, when it would have taken a merchant a day to do so.

Time had slipped through the cracks of what remained of me. Time had caused the crumbling of my empire. But it was not entirely cruel. Time was merciful. Time had brought the future generation to me. People swarmed the roads that were once considered dangerous and arduous to travel. Enhanced it with the technology of their time. Foreigners traveled all around the world just to admire the newfound technology that was based on me, as organizations cultivated archives that told my story and of my glory when I used to rule the world.

They remembered me.

Another metal box zipped across the tracks on these newly built pillars. They did not carry the luxury goods I was familiar with, but they still carried commodities that were considered important. Information. Commerce. Connection. Where my empire used to rule, another had been built in my honor.

They remembered me.

I took a deep breath, watching like a silent sentinel over this new system, ensuring its success. This new legacy would carry on and act as my second chance in this new time. A halfhearted smile stretched across my face as I watched another batch be shipped from the east all the way to the west. For they had remembered my purpose and reinvigorated my duty as an overseer of exchange and prosperity, yet they had removed memories that flooded back after centuries. There would be no more stories around the campfire. There would be no more sharing of discoveries in caravanserais. There would be no more hooves trotting on sandy expanses or rocky terrain. Nothing but the sound of metal boxes flying from the west to the east and vice versa, carrying goods that made each party stronger.

Regardless, they still remembered me.

They still remembered the glory I could bring.

They had remembered my purpose but left my soul.

Yet, they have remembered me.

Creative Writing: Fiction – Group 5 WINNER

The Girl with the Red Silk Sash

Shanghai High School International Division, Felina Fu – 16

“Hush now, αγοράκι. He is coming for you.”

Elias’ face stung. His throat felt like sandpaper, and his eyes watered. All he could see was the horizon, separating two colors: blue and glittering gold. He carried no more than the exquisite silk tunic on his back and a golden enkolpion around his neck, and yet his little legs trembled with soreness as the sand underneath sunk him deeper and deeper with every step. Running had turned to walking, and walking to crawling. As long as he moved forward, she had said, he would find safety.

Slowly, the ringing in his ears grew louder, and his eyes fluttered shut.

Droplets of water caressed the boy’s youthful cheeks, dampening the violent, stinging sensation. Elias snapped fully alert as he felt the soft press of a finger on the tall bridge of his nose. Before his eyes could readjust to the desert’s bright morning, he was scrambling backwards, struggling to stand. A girl was kneeling next to his makeshift bed of sand, her head tilted curiously. Her skin gleamed like polished oak, and her tunic was oddly cut. She seemed so small that she must have been even younger than Elias, but her features resembled none of the thousands of people he had seen in his life.

Her hair, black as coal, darker yet shinier than he ever knew hair could be, was tied back with a thin silk sash, glowing the color of fire even in the scorching sun.

The intensity of her stare paralyzed him. It held no menace, nor trepidation, only sheer curiosity that made Elias realize that his was probably the same.

Elias touched the water on his face and saw the damp cloth in the girl’s hand. A man, dressed in the same strange clothing as the little girl stood next to her, squinting at him with his eyebrows slightly raised. He, too, had strange features, much resembling the girls’.

“Who are you?” Elias asked, his voice hoarse yet loud and steady. The girl exchanged looks with the man, an unreadable smile playing on her lips.

“Can you not speak? I command you to answer me.” The man shouted something to someone behind Elias in a strange tongue. Turning, he saw the small caravan not far away. Seven or eight men, all of them resembling the man and the girl in front of him, stood peering at Elias. When he looked back, the girl had risen to her feet, pointing at the caravan, holding Elias’ gaze. The man stepped forward, gesturing for him to walk. His gaze softened when Elias would not move, and he held out a bag of water.

Snatching the hide bag from the man’s hand, he gulped the water down to the last drop. Next to him, he heard the girl giggle as she pushed him towards the caravan.

Their camels carried heaps of cloth and bags of covered goods. Like the man, the merchants' frames were lanky and their cheeks hollow. The clothes they wore were bland and worn, no gems were studded on their collars, no gold plated on their harnesses; they were the kinds of merchants, peasants, that Elias had been told to stay away from. Godless, worthless, filth is what his father had called them. Smiling, the men, some old and some young, spoke their strange language amongst themselves, watching the young boy walking towards them.

When they stopped in front of a resting camel, a creature that barely regarded them with its bored, long-lashed eyes, Elias turned to the man behind him, eyes questioning. Instead of answering, the man's skinny arms wrapped around the little girl to hoist her on the camel's back. Elias was set down in front of her, facing her awkwardly. The camel rose gracefully, and the caravan continued its voyage.

Elias felt a tap on his shoulder. Turning his head, he saw the girl point at herself.

"Mei!" She said, with a smile, proceeding to poke Elias' shoulder.

"Elias." He replied. Then, hesitantly, he poked the girl's shoulder back, repeating her name to her. Mei's smile widened at the sound of her name, and Elias noticed the light dimples below each corner of her smile.

"E-li-as," she repeated slowly, the round syllables unfamiliar and clumsy on her tongue. She poked his shoulder again, a game now established, and Elias found himself mirroring her smile with a tentative one of his own. Mei's eyes moved past Elias, and she pointed at the man sitting on the camel in front of theirs.

"Ba-ba!" Mei shouted something at him, and his attention shifted towards Elias.

"Lu," the man said, gesturing at himself.

The world lurched and swayed as the beasts made their long strides. He marveled at why the merchants had helped him, and he wondered where they were taking him. He wondered if his father would have heard of his disappearance by now.

Elias watched the dunes turn in the distance in silence, not knowing how anyone would know where he was, and waited for the sun to descend. The skin on his nose was burning up again, and he felt sun rays reflect to his eyes in the sharp golden glitter.

Squinting, he turned to face the girl again, only to find her already watching him, musingly, her bright grin turned into a wide-eyed gaze. Her head was covered with a thin cloth. She reached into a saddle pocket and handed Elias a similar cloth, saying something he could not comprehend. Muttering a quiet "thank you", he draped the cloth over his head as Mei watched him.

From another pocket, she retrieved a small candy looking like an old, withered sun. She popped it in her mouth and gave another to Elias. It felt sticky in the heat, and looked much like dried fruit. He tasted it hesitantly, before the familiar apricot flavor dawned on him and he lit up in silent joy with its sweet, syrupy taste. Mei held her hand between the two of them, the candies in her palm, and they ate silently.

Elias realized that Mei had resumed watching him silently. The girl slowly raised her finger, pointing at her own eye. Then, nodding at Elias, she speaks up again. Seeing his puzzled look, she attempts to point at Elias's light-blue eyes from a safe distance. Elias understood that she was studying him. She traced the fine and colorful embroideries on Elias' sleeve, and the single jewel around his neck. Mei studied his cross with the same penetrating curiosity she fixed upon his face. They sat quietly, unblinking, letting the sun and each other's wondrous gazes wash over them, their cheeks burning.

The first streaks of rose and honey were bleeding into the sky when Mei pointed forward excitedly. It was but a blurry smudge of green, floating on the horizon, half a shimmering illusion. But as they approached it, it became much more real. They felt the air turn damp before they mounted the last dune, an oasis unveiling itself below. A pool of light cradled in the desert's palm, a great wooden wheel turning beside it, spilling water into small, geometric gardens beside it. A mudbrick inn, protected by a low stone wall, was surrounded by camps of tents and pavilions. A forest of domed yurts of felt, waves of striped cloth and stacks of saddles adorned the small city of temporary homes.

Among it all was the commotion of people. First they saw men in similar clothing as Lu and Mei, their eyes small and hair black. He saw dark-bearded men with wrapped heads, just like he had seen many times in his own city. Some wore clothes of the strangest patterns. Others had skin the hue of obsidian. Finally, he caught sight of the homely faces of those who looked like him, dressed in simple tunics, the curves and jolts of their words finally recognizable. Elias wanted to speak to the men, but felt that he was in no rush.

Their own caravan found its spot among the tents, on a patch of hardened earth near a grove of tamarisk trees. Mei seized his hand in a firm grip, pulling them into a dash, into the stream of lively humanity ahead.

Mei's red sash guided him like a beacon through the lively crowd. The sights and sounds became distinct as they moved forward: the sharp barter over a bolt of silk in a merchant's hand, the chants of sitting songsters who practice their faiths, the clatter of the water wheel. The last rays of twilight were slowly traded for the lighting of torches and cooking fires, their smoke enveloping the scene, weaving a tapestry of aromas with the bitterness of spices, the sweetness of overripe fruit, and the musk of the resting animals.

The girl's eyes shone. Pointing and chattered in her musical tongue, They shared the sight of merchants trading the prized commodities of their homelands in the makeshift marketplace. Intricate carpets, fragile clay pots, and bags of bundled cinnamon lay before them, all the world's most beautiful possessions just for them to admire.

Her eyes stopped their impatient jumps at a glittering necklace. Three stones, polished into a heavenly blue, were embedded into a silver chain, dotted with golden pyrite stars. The owner of them, an old woman, smiled warmly up at the two children.

"I wish to have these for my friend," said Elias, pointing at the necklace.

She did not speak, but raised her hand instead, showing four fingers.

Elias did not know what she meant, but he did know that people always wanted something in return. He had been taught that no gift, no gesture, and certainly no jewel, was priceless. He knew, but he did not always understand.

He caught the old woman pass a gaze onto his tunic, and when he looked down he was reminded of his enkolpion. Before they were parted, his nurse had told him that this cross would be what would help him, and he need only pray. He could not see that it was God who had helped him.

He untied the golden medallion from his neck, carefully handing it to the woman. Her wrinkled face transfigured with rapture, and she hurried up to retrieve the precious stone necklace from its case. Mei's jaw dropped slightly as the old woman tied the precious necklace around the young girl's neck, but she remained still, a bright blush crawling towards her cheeks as she looked down and her hands caressed the gift. Elias was pleased and prepared for them to continue their exploration, walking ahead, but he was stopped by Mei's sudden fierce embrace. She released him swiftly, smiling at him, and muttered too syllables of what Elias understood to be gratitude.

When they returned to the tents, Mei showed off her necklace to all the merchants, occasionally pointing at Elias as she twirled in happiness. They sat around a fire, roasting flatbread over the fire. A man passed the baked loaves around, dropping one in Elias' hands, warming them. To him the food was simple, but it was comforting, despite all he had been through in the last two days.

The oasis's lights died one by one, signaling their long awaited sleep. Elias was given a mat and a blanket, and a place in one of their tents. He bid Mei goodnight.

Elias woke to the soft, warm light of dawn. The men were already preparing for their long day's journey, tending to the camels and packing their tents. Mei was nowhere in sight.

Elias wandered through the camps, hoping to find her, until he soon found himself reach the stone wall of the Inn.

Going along it, he was about to turn the corner toward the gate when the sound of hooves stopped him cold. It was not the soft plod of camels, but the impatient clatter of horses.

He pressed himself against the rough stone and peered around the corner, cold dread pooling in the pit of his stomach. A dozen men were at the gate on horseback, dressed in tunics of felt and fur; on each and everyone of their hips, a long-curved sword. Their leader was already inside, barking at the innkeeper. Elias didn't have to see their leader to recognize his rough voice scraping across the courtyard.

Elias' nurse took his cheeks in her hands. "Run, αγοράκι. Keep running and don't look back. It's you they want." The sour smell of sweating camels in the air mixed with a metallic taste in his throat. With a violent jerk, his nurse was taken by her waist. Elias could do nothing else but run, into the dunes, before the raiders could notice he was missing. When he looked back, the horses had already trampled up a storm of sand in the distance, leaving behind his flaming caravan.

Elias was a statue against the wall. The raiders were beginning to rouse with impatience, their hands coming up to their swords. Before he could fathom what was happening, a small hand had grabbed his shoulder, pulling him backwards. Mei broke into a sprint, and Elias followed. As they approached their caravan, Mei shouted frantically, and the merchant's movements became hurried. Bags were thrown on camel backs and saddles were secured roughly. Mei and Elias were lifted onto their camels, and the caravan escaped the oasis within minutes. Behind them, they heard the oasis's peace erupt into bedlam.

"How-how did you know the-they were..?" Elias' voice was still strangled with panic as he asked Mei. She looked as though she understood him, but only nodded compassionately in return.

The day passed much faster than the day before. Mei's smile had soon flickered back like a candle flame in the dark, startling their tense silence. Elias learned to understand more of Mei's wit, and they taught each other the simple words of hello and goodbye through a struggle of mute charades. The sun blazed less relentlessly and the sand hissed less viciously. Forward and backward swayed their camel. By the time the vast blue was painted over by violet and gold again, the only oasis in sight was the one of their own making as they set up camp among the endless hills of sand.

They sat on the crest of a great dune, watching the sun preform its final trick of light with their small shadows thrown on the eastern hill in the distance. Mei stood, and for a moment, she was an elongated giant, one with the dune's golden canvas. The great ambassador of the desert spirit, she flared her arms and flicked her legs, her giggles the most contagious sound. Her silhouette faded as the sun dipped over, sinking the desert in a deep blue velvet dome. They resumed their comfortable silence as the first dim stars pricked through, watching the cold diamonds shyly reveal themselves one by one.

Orange light lit the trough between the dunes beneath them, casting flickering shadows of the men around the fire. Elias spent the evening listening to the sound of the men telling stories, seeing the rise of kingdoms on the knit brow above Mei's sparkling eyes and the fall of empires on the small "o" formed by her mouth. Their voices faded away as he watched the face of the girl who granted him more familiarity than he had ever thought possible.

He did not know when the men had set up the tents, nor did he know how much time had passed, when he was in his blanket again, waiting for sleep to come. Not far beside him, he heard the soft utterance of a sweet voice.

"Gud-nigh!"

Elias woke to the thunder of hooves.

He blinked, but he was disoriented in the dim light of his empty tent. Panicked shouts outside broke the early morning silence; the low bellows of fear from the camels, the screeching and clanking of metals, the violent sound of ripping tents. Elias listened more closely to the shouts outside. He felt a surge of relief when he realized some were speaking his language. But when he finally exited his tent, the sight whipped it all away in an instant.

Soldiers, their familiar armor polished and gleaming with his father's crest, an armor of grace and honor, were the cause of the chaos. The merchants scrambled in the sand, not to fight, but to salvage what they could if not themselves, looking around helplessly. Above the broken anthill of a sight were the soldiers on horseback. The dispersed troop was double the size of their caravan. Fine, colorful fabric was scattered on the ground, along with bags of dried leaves and other cloths.

The armored men laughed. One tossed a bag of spices onto the pile of spoils. The sack ruptured, releasing a cloud of sweetness—the same scent that had hung over the oasis market.

Some were drawing their swords.

A rough hand clamped down on Elias' shoulder.

"Your father, King Theodus of Aetopetra, has searched for you. You'll be safe now, my prince."

Elias was snatched by the waist and placed on the soldier's horse before he could utter a sound. As they rode away, he saw it, abandoned in the sand.

A red silk sash.

"No! No! Let go, I command you! Mei!" Elias screamed and thrashed, but the soldier would not budge. Twisting his neck back desperately, the last thing he saw was Lu, lying on his side. His eyes stared blankly ahead, his face drained of color, as the desert silently wove him a blanket of flowing sand.

A single shrill scream lingered in the air, and all the boy could taste was apricot and ash.

Fiction – Group 6

WINNER

The Helpful Camel

Korean International School Springboard, Tsui Yau Yau Claire Summer – 11

Chapter 1 : Not very helpful

On a very peculiar day in the Taklamakan desert, there was an equally peculiar camel. This camel, along with the caravan of hardworking merchants, helpful servants and ordinary camels, was a camel that was remarkably lazy. In the desert, where food is dry and meager, and the journey complicated and long, the lazy camel refused to walk, ate food, and burped. In fact, this camel was soooooo unhelpful that he would never help his owner, never. His owner was understandably very unhappy. In fact, he was so sad that he didn't want to talk to this camel anymore.

Everything changed when a note from the king. One day, on holiday, the camel was lounging and enjoying his camel snacks. Then, a note was delivered by a pigeon named, well, Pigeon to the merchants – a valuable looking scroll made of silk, with extra fancy writings on it. The camel got curious – what could it be? Crudely and rudely, he snatched the note with his big camel teeth. The merchant who had the note was really angry with the camel. “Hey! how rude of you to snatch my note!” yelled the Merchant.

But the camel did not care about the man, or what he was saying. He was too busy opening the scroll with his camel feet! After a lot of struggling, stomping and pushing and shoveling, he finally opened it. On the note, it said “Please, we are going to finish building the Silk Road. Next year, there will be a contest to bring the most valuable item to the emperor. The owner of that camel will become the emperor and rule all of China.” The camel was very excited but realised he was so lazy that he could not join the contest.

After crying very hard about himself, the lazy camel decided to give up on junk food. Sadly, he cannot resist the food and keep eating. The berries and the sweets are just too good! The bed, too comfy; the caravan, walking too fast; the goods, too heavy! Frustrated, the camel kept rolling on the floor and stumbled upon a book.

The camel read the book and found a magic cave on page 15. It said, “This is a magical cave that has the legendary golden dragon statue located to the north of China, it is the rarest treasure in the world.” The camel knows what to bring to the emperor “the legendary golden dragon statue.” murmured the camel. So, the camel is set out on an adventure to find the treasure.

In the middle of the night, the camel escaped his house and went outside of the desert. The city was quiet and everyone was fast asleep, so the camel escaped safely from the people and their camels. “The book said that I would have to go through the oasis, then I would have to walk through the city where they only allowed local people and did not allow camels, and in the end I would have to go back to the China mountains and survive from the dragon guardian.” the camel shuddered. Determined, he set out on his way anyway.

In the morning the camel's owner woke up to find the camel missing. Worried he got kidnapped, the owner called the royal guards (police at the time). "Sorry we can't find your camel, we looked everywhere but still no evidence!" The police said. The owner was shocked and decided to go to the oasis to find the camel.

Turns out, the desert is quite big, and everywhere looks the same – lots and lots of sand, some dunes, and a random rock. The camel went his way to get to the oasis but it was toooooo complicated to find his way. "What was I thinking?" sighed the camel. Dragging his feet, he was very ready to walk back home when he saw a cat and a dog. "We are tour guides to people's directions. We want to help you go to the oasis, but first we need your help to fix our boat. It's broken," sang the cat and dog. The camel agreed and decided to make the promise to fix it so that he could go to the oasis.

During the journey a pack of wolves were secretly watching the camel, dog and cat. They were scavengers, and their LOVE treasures!

"If I kidnapped the cat" Said wolf 1, "we would be able to find the way to the treasures!"

"We need to be sneaky." One wolf said. "Wolves, we should pretend to be camels so we can camouflage through the oasis and later we can catch the cat." The wolves disguised as camels and later arrived at a shortcut to the oasis.

Chapter 2 : The adventure begins

With great difficulty, the camel finished building the boat. It was tough to find the wood to make a raft!

"Thank you camel now we can travel to the oasis." thanked the cat and dog.

Once the raft was finished, the camel, dog and the cat rowed the boat. It was a little shaky, but it managed to set out to the sea until a terrible storm appeared. The raft shook like an autumn leaf in the stormy sea.

"Maybe I was right, it is not a good idea to not go on an adventure." cried the camel. The cat and dog comforted the camel and said. "It's ok we can still find a way to the oasis." The camel now has more confidence and found another way to get to the oasis – getting back on land, keep making lefts and walking into the jungle. The cat and dog were surprised when they found out the camel was able to find another way by the book.

2 hours later the owner walked to the oasis and said. "Excuse me, where is my camel?" asked the camel's owner, a merchant said. "sorry the camel ran away to the dark jungle." The owner was sad and went back home to wait for the camel, hoping he would come back soon. The owner prayed to the saints so that the camel could come back soon but he didn't know that saints did not exist.

At last the camel, dog and cat arrived at the oasis with the book's help. The dog and cat said. "Thank you camel for helping us all go to the oasis. This book must be very helpful." The camel said. "This is a secret only between us, you should not tell your owner." The dog and cat promised they would never tell anyone.

Finally they arrived at the oasis. The oasis was very busy –there were lots of people, lots of camels and also many shops. The camel has never seen something so amazing. He wished to live there forever. "I wish that I could live in this oasis." amazed the camel.

Suddenly a group of camels came and grabbed the cat. The cat screamed for help but it was too late the camel and the dog couldn't grab her paws. Suddenly the camel realised that they were not camels, but they were wolves in disguise. The wolves brought the cat to Egypt and gave her to the pharaoh. The pharaoh said. "Wow this cat's fur is good for making a new carpet but first I must kill her." But the dog came and later went to stop the

pharaoh.” Don’t kill the cat because she is my only friend, and meet my new camel friend. Please don’t make fun of him for being lazy.” cried the dog. But the pharaoh didn’t listen and laughed at the camel.

The camel felt sad and decided to give up but the dog said.” Camel lets me deal with the pharaoh later and starts the adventure with 2 of us.” The camel went with the dog to the city that did not allow black people and camels. In the city there were many beautiful structures and fancy 5 star restaurants. But the problem is that there was a family’s daughter that was punished by the mayor.” Stop hitting our daughter.” sobbed the family.” No, I would not allow your daughter because she is black.” yelled the mayor. The camel and dog saw everything and decided to hide in a bush. The camel bravely came and kicked the mayor’s butt.” owwww!” screamed the mayor. The camel and dog ran away and secretly brought the family to a random hotel.” Thank you camel and dog, what can we do to repay you, but please go away because the mayor is going to find you.” cried the father.

The camel and dog ran away as fast as they could but were in big trouble.” Why are you taking me away.” yelled the camel. The mayor’s guards said.” This city is restricted for camels. We can’t let you in. The dog came and said.” Mayor’s guards, if you try to take the camel away then you will have to face the consequences.” The mayor’s guards ran away as fast as they could and decided to quit their jobs. Later all the people praised the camel and dog and now the city has never restricted the black people and camels ever again.

Chapter 3: Rescuing the cat

Right in Egypt the pharaoh and his wolves were hitting and yelling at the cat.” You disobedient cat, keep cleaning my shoes or else I will kill you.” the pharaoh yelled. The cat tried to clean but she couldn’t because she is a cat. The cat sobbed.” Please why do you want to kidnap me? I am just a cat.” The pharaoh yelled.” Shut up you disrespectful cat.” The pharaoh taped the cat’s mouth and later the cat could not breathe.

The camel and dog were later given a magic statue.” take this book it has real magic in it, if the pharaoh tries to attack you, use this statue to bring the characters to life.” encouraged the librarian.” Thank you librarian.” said the camel and dog. During the adventure they arrived at the pharaoh’s palace. The pharaoh asked.” You strangers, why are you here?” We are here for revenge, I will teach you.” yelled the camel and dog. The characters from the statue appeared and quickly freed the cat.” That will teach you.” yelled the characters from the statue. The pharaoh decided to tell his wolves to come for another plan for revenge. Later his wolves decided to dress up as humans so that they could capture the cat again.

Soon the camel, dog and cat followed the book that said.” To get to the mountains you must walk to the saffron village, and you must use this magic book to heal the richest man in this village.” The camel, dog and cat walked to the saffron village and saw many dead flowers, many fishermen and one extraordinary wooden mansion. The camel said.” I think this wooden mansion belongs to the richest man in this village.” The dog and cat decided to agree and they all went to the mansion. They saw the richest man inside of the mansion and saw a sick old man inside.” Help me.” cried the old man.” I only have 3 days to live.” The camel didn’t even know what to do but remembered what the book had said, so the camel read some strange words and later found out that the old man suddenly turned into a rich young quadrillionaire and said.” Thank you camel, dog and cat. You saved my life. As a reward I give you a digital map so that it can help you easily get to the high mountains.” The camel, dog and cat thanked the old man and left to walk to the mountains.

Chapter 4: The trading day

A year later there was an alliteration about the silk road trading from the emperor.”

At 8pm everyone must trade their most extraordinary treasure to me, but if you trade me something in common, you would be exiled forever, don't embarrass yourself!” yelled the emperor furiously. But then the camel's owner saw this and called the camel.” You only have an hour before the event, come back quickly or else you would be exiled!” cried the owner.” I promise I will be here soon.” reminded the camel. But when the camel, dog and cat arrived at the mountains it was too late. The silk road event has already started.” Oh no!” the camel screamed.” I don't know what to do.” The dog and cat decided to comfort the camel and said.” It's ok, we will find a way to get here as fast as we can, but first let's just find the golden dragon statue first and we will have plenty of time.”

Suddenly the camel realised the digital map and opened it. Suddenly it started to talk.” Hello I am the digital map. How can I help you.” said the digital map.” please show us the destination to the mountains.” said the cat. The digital map shows the camel, dog and cat the destination.” Thank you.” said the dog. They followed the destination and saw the legendary golden dragon statue. The statue was ancient and very beautiful. Suddenly the dragon guardian came and yelled.” Who are those trespassers? We do not want strangers in my temple.” We are here to bring your legendary golden dragon statue to the emperor.” said the camel, dog and cat.” Let's make a deal. If we can answer your question you can come with us to the adventure and trade the emperor your legendary golden dragon statue.” The dragon guardian gave the camel, dog and cat a question and said.” what is $6 \times (145 - 56) + 5 =$.” The dog answered.” The answer is 539 because when you add the extra numbers this is the answer.” Wow.” said the camel and cat.” Dog, you are so smart.” The dragon guardian was pleased.” Dog you are correct, the answer is 539.” said the dragon guardian.

Later the camel, dog and cat were about to give the emperor the legendary golden dragon statue until the pharaoh and his pack of wolves snatched the legendary golden dragon statue.” Hahahahahaha you will be exiled forever.” shouted the pharaoh. The camel was depressed and said.” I am sorry but would be exiled because the only thing left is nothing.” So the dragon guardian gave the camel a broken vase. Embarrassed, the camel hid under a bush. Then the emperor came and said.” may I look at your treasure?” But when the emperor saw this he was surprised.” Wow this vase would be worth millions, this is the most legendary treasure I've ever seen.” cried the emperor. Suddenly the dog, cat and the dragon guardian saw this and said.” Well done camel you are now the king.” Turns out the legendary golden dragon statue was just made of plastic instead of real gold.

The camel was crowned emperor and told the emperor's guards.” Arrest the pharaoh and his pack of wolves. We do not want something in common.” Why did we not win.” yelled the pharaoh.” The emperor said.” Because the legendary golden dragon statue is not made of real gold. It's made of plastic painted in gold. The camel was soon helpful and was never remarkably lazy again. The End

Chapter 5: A trip to shenzhen

So the day continued with the camel, dog, cat and the dragon guardian when the day went on another adventure to travel to Shenzhen and visit all of the destinations. Another peculiar day in the Taklamakan desert the camel's owner said,” Are you sure you can go on a holiday without your owner.” The camel said.” It is not only me. I have my friends named dog, cat and dragon guardian.” The camel made a promise from his owner, in fact he actually broke his promise from his owner. There was a bus waiting for the camel to come in. The

driver cried.” Please get here as fast as you can or we would have left earlier. ”The camel ran to the bus but his suitcases dropped when he was getting inside of the bus. The dog, cat and dragon guardian were waiting until they were shocked.” Where are your bags.” yelled the dog.” I dropped my suitcases when I was running. The dog ran out of the bus and picked out all of the camel’s suitcases and ran back to the bus.

During the adventure the bus driver drove very fast to the city but then the cat felt very sick. I need a vomit bag.” cried the cat. The camel gave his vomit bag but did not feel better. But tragically the plane has left already, the camel was sad.”It’s ok camel there is another plane in 3 hours.”comforted the dragon guardian. So the camel, dog, cat and dragon guardian decided to explore the airport to the shops, the restaurants, and the resorts just in case the plane was delayed.

Later an evil gang of hyenas had a secret plan.” This is our goal to steal the emperor’s crown and become the emperor of all of China.” Laughed one of the hyenas. The leader of the hyenas said.” This is our only chance to steal the throne. This quest should be ironic or else you all are fired. To be continued

Fiction – Group 7 WINNER

Six Traders, One Dream

Korean International School Springboard, Adrian Lin – 20

Once upon a time in Wuhan, China, there lived a family who wanted to start a trading business. They are called the Jiangnan family. Zhang is the head of the family and his wife is called Wei. They are the head of the Jiangnan 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 Jiangnan 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.

For example, around 240 million years ago, a serpent-like reptile named *Dinocephalosaurus* roamed the earth. The *Dinocephalosaurus* had a very long neck. Researchers recently described that *Dinocephalosaurus* is a giant. That dinosaur was found in southern China and was believed to be a marine animal and probably used its long neck to hunt along with its fang-like teeth to catch prey.

The reason why China has a lot of fossils is because of the huge area China covers.

Non-Fiction – Group 1 WINNER

The Silk Road: A Journey from Past to Future

YK Pao School Shanghai, Chen Yi An Anne – 8

The Silk Road only became known as The Silk Road in the 19th century, but the history of the route stretches back thousands of years.

Around 2000 years ago, Rome and China wanted direct travel between them because they wanted to trade. However, the Parthians were in the middle of the two great empires, and tried to stop them. The Romans then developed the Maritime Silk Road, which went across the sea just around the Parthians.

By around the 13th century, it became much easier to travel from China to Europe by land. However, the Silk Road was not only one main road. There were many branches of the Silk Road spread around the world. The main route started by going along the Great Wall, then continued to spread into the Taklamaken Desert, over the Pamir Mountains, and through Central Asia to Rome.

Around that time, explorers and merchants like Marco Polo began to travel along the Silk Road. Marco Polo was one of the greatest explorers of his time. He was famous for traveling from Venice along the Silk Road to China and working for Kublai Khan, who was the first Emperor of the Yuan Dynasty. Marco Polo stayed in and travelled around China for many years. He learned the Chinese language and was fascinated by the cities, culture, luxury and wealth of the country. Moreover, Marco Polo's journey on the Silk Road inspired an informative book called The Book of the Marvels of the World which opened a window for the West to the knowledge of the East.

Despite its name, silk was not the only product that was traded on the Silk Road. Recipes like dumplings, pilaf, noodles, and ice cream were traded too, as well as other foods such as onions and carrots. Valuables such as porcelain, medicine, tea, camels, glass, gold and silver were also bought and sold. The Silk Road made trading easier, and global trade flourished.

It was not just goods that flowed along the Silk Road; arts, technology, and knowledge did as well. Stories like Aladdin were developed first in Kashgar, China and spread along the Silk Road. Religions such as Christianity and Buddhism also traveled along the route. China's four great inventions—gunpowder, compass, paper and printing were too transported along the Silk Road, to the Middle East and Europe.

The Silk Road is a pathway of globalization. In recent years, China is working on developing a new “Silk Road”. While camel caravans have been replaced by China-Europe freight trains, more roads, railways and ports are being built to connect China with many countries in Asia, Africa and Europe. Nowadays, the trade of goods and products, and the sharing of cultures and ideas, are becoming more convenient and efficient.

China’s Silk Road is a journey from the past to the future, and it is booming again. It bridges the eras, helps the world become more connected, and improves the lives of people all over the world.

Creative Writing: Non-Fiction – Group 1 WINNER

Zhang Qian and the Silk Road

The King's School Qianhai Shenzhen, Akira Yang – 8

Over two thousand years ago during the Han Dynasty, a man named Zhang Qian was sent to the West. He went through big mountains and rivers. Sometimes he felt hungry. Sometimes he got captured, but Zhang Qian never gave up. He finally found a way to the western regions and connected the East with the West.

From then on, China's silk, porcelain and tea were sent to far away western countries through this road. They love Chinese silk. They thought it was light, soft, and smooth to touch. Meanwhile, spices, glass and grapes from the West made life in China more colourful.

Later, during the Eastern Han Dynasty, there was another great man named Ban Chao, who worked to reopen the Silk Road, which had been blocked for many years. His efforts made the road wider and allowed even more countries to trade with China.

The Silk Road was not just for trade caravans; it was also a way to share culture and knowledge. Through this road, China shared many inventions with the world, like silk-making, pottery, paper-making, and iron-smelting. They became even busier. The monk Yuan Zang travelled West along the Silk Road to India to Buddhist scriptures. When he returned, he wrote a book called *Records of the Western Regions*. It described the people and places he saw, full of fascinating stories.

During the Yuan Dynasty, an Italian traveller named Marco Polo came to China along the Silk Road. He travelled in China for many years, and later wrote a book called *The Travels of Marco Polo*. The book described China.

The Silk Road was not just a trade route, it was also a bridge of friendship and culture. It helped people from different countries understand and help each other, making the world a better place. Many Chinese people and people from other countries like this long road, and now the Silk Road has changed into what it's becoming in future – a great train line.

The story of the Silk Road tells us we need to be brave and believe in ourselves – if you believe in yourself, you will be better and better. Zhang Qian was very brave, if he was not brave, he would never have crossed the Silk Road. After Zhang Qian came back, he told lots of people about the Silk Road story and the king liked Zhang Qian so much he held a big party for him. They thought Zhang Qian to be a hero. If Zhang Qian was alive today, I'd like to listen to his stories also.

Non-fiction – Group 2

WINNER

The Chessboard of Silk and Strategy: Old Roads, New Dreams

St. Joseph's Primary School, Daryl Ng – 10

As dusk settles and the harbour lights dance like chess pieces waiting for their turn, I open my book on the Silk Road, ready to step into a timeless game of journeys and exchanges. The pages feel like squares on a board, caravans like knights, and the ships outside glide like rooks across the glittering board. Through stories, I hear camel bells, smell cinnamon and pepper, and see silk shimmer like water.

The Silk Road isn't just history to me, but a game that never ends. Each move across the board carried treasures, e.g. silk from China, glassware from Rome, spices from India, paper from our own scholars. Each move also carried ideas about religions, technologies, scientific knowledge, and art forms, changing shape as they travel. I feel like a player waiting for my turn, wondering what piece I'll place on the board of the New Silk Road.

In 139 BC, Emperor Wu sent Zhang Qian west to find new lands and allies, a single bold move that opened the Silk Road. I picture Chang'an buzzing like a chessboard at the start of play. The Silk Road was not a single road but a web of paths stretching over 6000 kilometres across the Gobi Desert and the Pamir Mountains. Traders travelled in caravans with camels to protect themselves from robbers, stopping at caravanserais. Few people journeyed the entire route; instead, middlemen and trading posts kept the goods and ideas moving, square by square, like a long strategic game. Merchants carried silk soft as clouds, jade symbolizing wisdom, and porcelain shimmering under the sunlight. In return, caravans brought baskets of Persian grapes bursting with sweetness, ruby-bright pomegranates from distant valleys, powerful horses from Central Asia and Roman glassware sparkling like captured rainbows. Tea drifted west with its fragrance, spices and gemstones added colour to the journey, while textiles and crafted tools moved east.

The Silk Road carried more than goods. It carried games too. Chaturanga from India evolved into Shatranj in Persia, later into international chess, while in China, Xiangqi took shape with a river on the board and Generals who cannot meet. Yet as pieces changed, strategy held. Children in caravan camps learnt rules the way they learnt words, swapping moves like they swapped stories by the fire. Across the centuries, chess blossomed into thousands of identifiable variants and hundreds of millions of people play.

Religion and ideas spread just as fluidly. Buddhist monks carried scriptures eastward, Islamic scholars shared astronomy and medicine, and Christian missionaries travelled across continents. Towns along the routes grew into multicultural cities, where languages mixed and innovations flourished. Horses introduced to China strengthened the Mongol Empire, while gunpowder from China reshaped the European warfare. One famous traveller was Marco Polo, who journeyed

from Venice to Xanadu in 1275. His adventure made the Silk Road famous in Europe, inspiring generations to imagine lands beyond their own.

When I imagine the Silk Road, I don't picture merchants first. I see children. A boy from Persia might hand me a carved horse piece; I'd give him a flat Xiangqi disk with Chinese characters. We'd grin at the differences, then play on the same board. Under a tamarisk tree, families traded not only silk and jade but also inventions, e.g. compasses to steer ships, papermaking that spread learning, and remedies for fevers. Musicians carried rhythms and cooks swapped noodles, spices, olives, and dates. Imagine tasting a Roman grape while teaching someone how to move a knight across the board. Every encounter was a lesson, every friendship a discovery, and every invention a new piece added to the board.

By the 1400s, ships had begun to sail across oceans, carrying goods faster than camels could cross deserts. The caravans faded, and the road grew quiet. The story felt unfinished until 2013, when China revived the idea with the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Now the pieces become high speed trains, cargo ships, airplanes, and digital networks. Countries trade machines, medicines, and ideas that travel instantly online. The BRI stretches across land and sea, building lanes where goods, services, capital, and ideas can move. Today, more than 150 countries are part of this new game, each placing their pieces on the global board.

Hong Kong, being a vital connector in the BRI, links Mainland projects to global capital and expertise while deepening cultural and educational exchanges. Its role isn't only economic but symbolic. Hong Kong is a place where East meets West, resembling the crossroads of the ancient Silk Road.

China's high-speed rails, ports, and digital Silk Road have already made the game alive again. But its future depends on us, the new players. I imagine sitting in a classroom with students from faraway places, each of us telling stories of our homes, then playing a match of chess. The Silk Road isn't only about trade. It's about people finding ways to understand each other through moves and ideas.

I wonder what my move will be. Perhaps I'll be an engineer, building bridges that connect countries like rooks across the board. Or a scientist, working on clean energy projects that shine like bishops guiding the way. Maybe I'll design games that teach history, so children across continents can play together and learn how the Silk Road once carried both silk and strategy.

The Silk Road has always been more than a road. It's a thread weaving people together across time and distance. Once, the Silk Road shimmered with silk, jade, spices, and games. Now, it hums with trains, ships, satellites, and digital sparks. In the future, it may carry treasures no caravan ever held—our imagination, our friendships, and the dreams we dare to share. The story of the Silk Road isn't finished. It's still being written, move by move, step by step. And one day, we'll place our own pieces onto the board, adding a new chapter to its endless tale of connection and discovery.

Creative Writing: Non-Fiction – Group 2 WINNER

The Silk Road: A Simple Story of Travel, Learning, and Change

Shanghai Singapore International School, Agastya Wangkheimayum – 10

The Silk Road is one of the most famous networks of travel and trade in world history. Even though it is called a “road,” it was really a large group of paths, trails, and routes that spread across Asia, the Middle East, and into parts of Europe and Africa. For many centuries, people used these routes to move goods, ideas, and culture. The Silk Road helped people from many different countries learn about one another, and it changed the world in important ways.

The First Travelers

Long before the Silk Road had its famous name, people were already travelling across Central Asia. Many of the first travellers were nomads—people who moved with their animals from place to place. Nomads knew the deserts, mountains, and grasslands very well, and they knew how to survive long journeys. They traded useful things like animal skins, tools, and food. Even these early trades helped ideas spread from one group to another.

One of the most important early travellers was a Chinese explorer named **Zhang Qian**. In **138 BCE**, the emperor of China sent him westward to learn about other kingdoms. His journey was long and difficult. He was captured, escaped, and travelled through dangerous areas. When he finally returned to China many years later, he brought back valuable information. He described stronger horses from Central Asia, new foods like grapes and alfalfa, and cultures with customs that China had never seen before. His reports helped China to develop trade with western regions. His journey helped shape what we now call the Silk Road.

People Learning About One Another

As more people began to travel along the Silk Road, it became a meeting place for many cultures. Merchants, explorers, religious teachers, and scholars used the routes to move from place to place. Some carried goods to trade, while others carried knowledge, stories, and beliefs.

Many different items travelled along the Silk Road. China sent silk, tea, and paper. India sent spices, ivory, and cotton cloth. Persia sent carpets, jewellery, and beautiful glassware. The Roman Empire sent gold, silver, and strong glass cups and bottles. Many items travelled very far from where they were made, passing through many hands before reaching their final destination.

Goods were not the only things that moved along the Silk Road. Ideas and religions travelled too. Buddhist monks from India used the Silk Road to bring Buddhism into China. Over time, Buddhism influenced Chinese art, architecture, and ways of thinking. Later, Chinese monks travelled back along the same route to learn more. One of the most famous monks, **Xuanzang**, spent many years crossing deserts and mountains to collect Buddhist teachings. When he returned, he shared what he had learned and helped spread these ideas further.

Along the Silk Road, people heard many languages, tasted foods from faraway places, and saw many styles of clothing and buildings. Cities along the route—such as **Kashgar** and **Samarkand**—became rich and full of culture. In these cities, travellers traded goods, shared music, told stories, and learned new skills from one another. The Silk Road became a powerful example of how cultures can mix and grow.

The Last Great Travelers

Over time, sea routes opened up, traveling by ship became faster and safer than crossing deserts and mountains. Still, some famous travellers made their journeys along Silk Road routes during its later years.

One was **Marco Polo**, a merchant from Venice. In the 1200s, he traveled to China and spent many years exploring Asia. When he returned home, he wrote a book describing what he had seen. People in Europe were amazed by his stories about Chinese cities and powerful rulers. His writings inspired curiosity about Asia.

Another famous explorer was **Ibn Battuta** from Morocco. He travelled through North Africa, the Middle East, India, Central Asia, and China. He wrote detailed descriptions of the people he met, the foods he ate, and the traditions he observed. His writing gives historians useful information about life across many regions at that time.

By the 1400s and 1500s, the land travel along the Silk Road were less common. Wars, bandits, and shifting borders made travel harder. Sea routes took over most long-distance trade. Even so, the cultural connections built through the Silk Road lasted for centuries.

A New Silk Road for Today's World

Today, people sometimes talk about building a “new Silk Road.” This means creating new connections—such as highways, railways, ports, airports, and digital communication—that link countries across Asia, Africa, and Europe. These links no longer use camels and caravans, but the purpose is similar: to support trade, travel, and learning.

A modern Silk Road could bring several benefits. One benefit is stronger cooperation between countries. When nations work together on shared projects, they can build better relationships and solve problems more peacefully.

Another benefit is cultural exchange. Just like the ancient Silk Road connected people, a modern one can help people share music, art, stories, and traditions. The internet makes this easier, allowing students and teachers from different places to learn from one another.

A new Silk Road could also support economic growth, especially in developing areas. Better transportation can help regions sell goods more easily, create jobs, and improve living standards. Cities along modern routes could become busy and successful, just as Silk Road cities once were.

Finally, modern connections can support cooperation in science and technology. Countries can work together on climate research, health care, clean energy, and new inventions. Just as the ancient Silk Road helped spread inventions like papermaking, modern networks can help spread new discoveries.

Why the Silk Road Still Matters

The Silk Road is important today because it shows the power of human connection. It teaches us that when people meet and share ideas, they learn and grow. The Silk Road was more than trading objects. It was also about sharing beliefs, art, traditions, and knowledge.

It reminds us that the world is always changing. Today we can travel across continents in hours or send messages in seconds. The main idea of the Silk Road—connecting people across distance—still matters. Whether someone was walking across deserts hundreds of years ago or joining an online class today, the spirit of learning from others continues.

Conclusion

The story of the Silk Road is a story of travel, discovery, and learning. It began with early travellers crossing hard landscapes. It grew into a network that connected many cultures. It continued through explorers like Marco Polo and Ibn Battuta. Today, it inspires new ideas about how countries can cooperate and share knowledge.

No matter which part of the Silk Road we focus on, the message is the same: when people trade, share, and learn from one another, the world becomes a richer and more connected place.

Non-fiction – Group 3 WINNER

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 Shenzhong 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.

Non-Fiction – Group 4

WINNER

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.

Creative Writing: Non-Fiction – Group 4 WINNER

Pioneering the road of aspirations — the Long and Arduous journey

G.T. (Ellen Yeung) College, Lee Sze Ngai Jasper – 13

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.

Non-Fiction – Group 5 WINNER

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.

Creative Writing: Non-Fiction – Group 5 WINNER

Echos of the Silk Road: Bridging Past and Present

Pui Ching Middle School (Macau), Ana Guo – 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 WINNER

The Silk Road

Korean International School Springboard, Kai Setyawan – 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 Afghanistan. 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 WINNER

From Ancient Rome to Modern Highway: Marco Polo's Journey Along the Silk Road

Korean International School Springboard, Fan Ka Chun Ethan – 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.

Outsmarting Saul in the Silk Road Scavenger Race

Korean International School Springboard, Mattea Abbey Choi – 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.

Poetry – Group 1

WINNER

The Weight of Jade

St. Joseph's Primary School, Yiu Chi Chim – 7

Father measures jade by weight and flaw,
His thumb tracing price in every vein.
I measure miles by a stranger's script,
And count the stars in a foreign name.
He fears the storm will be our only death;
I fear it will be the only story told.
We returned to Chang'an with two kinds of weight:
One purse of silver, small and definite, and one thick ledger, filled with what the night.
And strangers gave us – seeds of knowing, light.
Not meant for sale, but meant to integrate.
We do not close the ledger. We compile.
His memory, my ink – a single thread.
The Road runs through this quiet, lamplit aisle.
No good is finished, and no final mile is counted, while a thing remains unsaid.
The true trade happened not with spice or silk,
But in the space between his skill and my surmise.
The stronger bond was woven not of silk or gold, but of the choice to walk that walk.
And see the world with each other's eyes.

Creative Writing: Poetry – Group 1 WINNER

The Dusty Silk Road

Po Leung Kuk Choi Kai Yau School, Yu Shen Xing Hazel – 9

From China far, a road begins,
Where trade and travel count their wins.
Across the land, Through mountains high,
Beneath the big and open sky.

*Camels walk with heavy load,
Upon the dusty, bumpy road!*

They carry silk, so soft and bright,
A treasure shining in the light.
Gold and spices, pots and tea,
For everyone, for you and me.

*Camels walk with heavy load,
Upon the dusty, bumpy road!*

Ideas shared, and stories told,
More precious even than the gold.
Friends are made in every place,
A happy smile on every face.

*Camels walk with heavy load,
Upon the dusty, bumpy road!*

Poetry – Group 2 WINNER

The Silk Road

German Swiss International School, Elizabeth Chiang – 11

Six thousand bolts of imperial silk:
These shall be my companions on the road.
I say “road”, but that is optimistic,
For nothing but grey sand lies before me,
Nothing but the wastes of Taklamakan.

Yesterday, I arrived at the crossroads — north or south?
I considered them both when all of a
Sudden rocks avalanched down before me,
Blocking both ways. I wanted to punch them.
No option but to trudge through the cruel sands.

I begin my treacherous hot journey
Across the dunes of the towering desert.
Barely eating or drinking: must preserve.
My legs are aching, my body feels limp,
Yet I am determined to keep going.

The next hundred miles are like a thousand.
The dromedaries cry with exhaustion,
While the mules bray, bored of sand — always sand.
Exasperation drives me to madness...
I pray for a heavenly glimpse of Kashgar.

Trudging, stumbling, pushing on, I deeply
Pray to Ahura Mazda, one true god,
That he grant me deliverance from pain.
Every step is brutal; I long for rest.
But I shan't stop. Ahriman won't take me.

Our caravan finally slows to a stop:
Lushan, my dutiful bodyguard, yells,
“Good sir, look yond, the city of Kashgar!”
I frown, I doubt — mirages have deceived
Many before. But then I spy a man.

At the gate, my trading partner awaits,
Grinning like a crescent moon. He greets me:
“Welcome old friend! Let us tour the city.”
Babbling citizens, colourful fruits stalls,
Floral perfumeries, local diners.

Never in life have I been more relieved
Than now, soaking in a warm soothing bath,
Stomach satisfied, brimming with fine food.
I take a blissful nap; serenity
Flows through me and I dream of unicorns.

A rooster’s crow wakes me from my slumber.
To business! I gather my goods: bolts of
Rainbow silk and precious, glimmering gold.
These my partner will take to Samarkand,
In exchange for items bound for China.

My eyes widen when I spot a gorgeous
Mongolian wild horse, galloping and
Dancing in the breeze. I name him Hunter.
I also receive radiant rubies,
Smiling sapphires. What a delightful day!

I load my goods onto the caravan,
Wave farewell to Kashgar, desert oasis.
Dunhuang, here I come! Xi’an, at long last!
Spirits lift at the thought of family:
My patient wife, my son like a bursting star.

Creative Writing: Poetry – Group 2 WINNER

Grain of Sand

St. Joseph's Anglo-Chinese Primary School, Guan Yi Jacob – 11

I am a grain of sand,
Drinking from rain's soft hand,
Basking in the sun's warm span.

A camel's hoof steps light on me,
Caravan bells chime o'er Gobi's Sea;
I cling, watch caravans flee,
Halt at the caravanserais,
Where spice-scented tales be.

Swept to a factory's heat,
Melted to glass, pure and neat,
Pressed to a microchip's quick beat.

Now I send messages bright,
Faster than camel, faster than ship's flight,
Old road's thread, stitching day and night,
From dunes to world's endless light.

Poetry – Group 3

WINNER

Grandma's Dream — If only I

Harrow International School Hong Kong, Celene Sze – 12

Grandma's Dream – If only I

Upon her porch, with silvered hair,
She sits and sips her tea.
Her wrinkled hands wrap the cup,
While her mind flies far and free.

She dreams of discovering spices and silks rare,
The ancient path, a world undiscovered —
The Silk Road's golden lane.

"If only I," she softly sighs,
"Could step through times door, be young and free again,
Be where camels wandered before,
To feel the thrill of life once more."

And so, as dawn arrives and paints rosy skies,
Time, anticlockwise.
Magic hums: she blinks her eyes,
And tumbles back where her spirit flies.

Her hair blonde again, her cheeks rosy once more,
Her laughter echoes, brought back to life,
Light and bright,
With a pack sitting on her back,
She sets upon her way.
Walking among traders, sharing their tales,
Crossing deserts,
Seeing bazaars alive with songs,

A thousand marvels,
A thousand mysteries,
A thousand hearts,
One dream come true.

But soon the road bends to her porch,
Her journey here is done,
And there she grins, her tea now cool in hand,
Her heart warmed by the sun, like sun on sand,

Her body old and fragile,
Her heart and spirit wander free,
Traveled far through time and seas.
If only I.

Creative Writing: Poetry – Group 3 WINNER

New Tales of China's Silk Road

Po Leung Kuk No. 1 W.H. Cheung College, Chai Yuk Ho – 14

In the half-light of a Suzhou dawn
a loom wakes up
like an ancient animal that has learned to dream in binary.

Old woman, silver hair pinned
with a jade comb the color of river mist,
feeds silk threads into the wooden throat:

white / gold / crimson / indigo—
the same colors caravans once carried
in the folded hush of bales and chests,
now slip into patterns that look like
city grids seen from an airplane,
data maps, subway veins,
the quiet circuits of a sleeping phone.

Her foot presses the pedal.
The shuttle flies—

a small, determined meteor
crossing a man-made sky,

and each strike of the loom is a hinge in history,
a soft percussion of centuries turning.

“Road,” she whispers, ,
and the word pulls taut in the air like a thread.
“Not only in the sand.
Not only under wheels.
Road is anything that learns to be crossed.”

Outside, the morning opens:
a river braiding under bridges,
truck engines coughing awake,
ships breathing at the far-off port.

The cloth grows on the loom:
dragons with copper scales,
clouds shaped like satellites,
camels whose humps are stacked containers,
their shadows the length of rail lines
running from Xi'an to cities
whose names she's only tasted in news-voice syllables—

Duisburg. Mombasa. Piraeus.

She has never left Jiangnan,
yet the road is quietly leaving through her fingers.

Long before the airplane print
on a boarding pass,
there was a thumbprint in clay,
a seal pressed into wax,
a contract made under borrowed stars.

Listen: the sand still holds the footsteps.

In the Taklamakan,
where wind combs dunes into flame-shaped ridges,
a caravan moves—not only of camels and tired jokes,
but of unwritten alphabets
searching for mouths.

A Sogdian merchant hums a broken lullaby;
his voice carries folded fabrics, bronze mirrors,
pouches of crushed saffron,
and a rumor of paper from the East—
light as dried lotus petals,
strong as the idea that you could bind thoughts
and send them walking
into someone else's future.

At Dunhuang, caves bloom out of cliff-face,
 walls crowded with painted bodhisattvas
 tracing mudras in eyelash strokes of mineral dust.
 Here, the Road kneels,
 lets its dust settle into pigments:
 lapis for the robes, vermilion halos,
 flecks of gold leaf like spun sun.

Monks tuck sutras behind clay smiles.
 A single stray merchant drops a love letter
 wrapped around his ledgers,
 never reclaimed—
 centuries later, archaeologists
 will hold it up to the light
 and hear two heartbeats
 echoing in the ink.

This is how the Road learns its first trick:
 to be both journey and archive,
 to leave behind not only footprints
 but the grammar of longing.

The Road grows impatient with sand,
 spreads itself into water.

At Quanzhou the harbor receives
 wooden ribcages of ships
 heavy with porcelain that remembers
 the kiln's brief inferno,
 tea that remembers mountain fog,
 characters brushed on silk
 that carry entire dynasties inside their strokes.

Masts write tall cursive on the sky.
 Sails swell like lungs startled awake.

The wind is an interpreter, fluent
 in Hokkien curses, Arabic prayers,
 Malay lullabies sung to restless cargo.

Storms redraw the map in one night;
 reefs argue with hulls in a language of splintering.
 Yet the Road persists, now tasting of salt:
 it clings to ropes, hides in barnacles,
 slips into a sailor's wedding ring,
 waits in the phosphorescent wake
 of a ship inching past Malacca.

Every port is a punctuation mark,
brief pause where spices argue with incense,
where a bowl of noodles shares steam
with lentils, cloves, cinnamon, dates.
Children from opposite ends of the ocean
swap marbles, recipes, ways to cheat at games.

So many beginnings mistaken for endings.

What history calls “silk”
was also this:
the slow erosion of fear in the face of difference,
the gradual, stubborn habit
of saying ni hao, salaam, vanakkam,
and meaning, imperfectly yet sincerely:
I will try to know you
before I name you.

Centuries tilt, and the page refreshes.
Watch how the script changes.

Now the Road is not alone:
it walks beside highways shivering with heat,
shares bedrock with bullet trains
that write silver lines across winter plains—
Beijing to Urumqi, Lanzhou to Xinjiang’s edge,
time collapsing into schedule.

Listen in the stations:
announcements in rising Mandarin,
falling Uyghur, clipped English;
someone sipping green tea
from a reusable cup printed with Wi-Fi icons.

Outside the carriage window,
ancient caravanserai crumble,
yet beside them rise logistics parks,
warehouses the size of vanished kingdoms,
cranes that lift containers like careful punctuation
in a long, multi-lingual sentence of trade.

Under deserts once feared as end-of-the-world,
fiber-optic cables glimmer in their glass skins,
a buried constellation.
Data caravans set out:
packets instead of pack animals,
pulses instead of hoofbeats.

We call it “Digital Silk Road,”
 as if naming might domesticate it,
 but in truth it is still unruly:
 signals ricocheting off satellites,
 voices arriving before the echo of themselves,
 video calls stuttering, then smoothing—
 a grandmother in Xi’an
 coaching her granddaughter’s Mandarin
 from Nairobi,
 internet café neon reflected
 in the girl’s determined eyes.

On a cargo train streaking toward Europe,
 a young engineer from Gansu
 scrolls through poems on his phone,
 downloads music from Kazakhstan,
 adds a Turkish phrasebook to his playlist.
 Between tunnels,
 he types notes for a song of his own:

*Road singing through me,
 who thought I’d be the one to travel?
 Yet here I sit,
 a moving dot on someone’s map,
 carrying a country and a question.

In a Greek port, cranes flex like steel calligraphy,
 inked against a bruised Mediterranean dawn.
 Containers arrive in a chromatic scale of blues and reds,
 each one a sealed story:
 air-conditioners, toys, bolts of cloth,
 solar panels bright as condensed sky.

A dockworker named Yiannis
 learns to say xie xie with his coffee,
 trades cigarette brands with a captain from Tianjin.
 They argue about football,
 exchange memes on their phones,
 laugh at how translators
 misunderstand the word for “home.”

On Kenya’s coast, a new railway line
 threads its way inland,
 the track shining like fresh ink.

A welder from Chengdu and a surveyor from Kilifi
share shade under an acacia tree.
Sweat runs in the same alphabet
down different spines.

“Back home,” the welder says,
“we build bridges to cross rivers.”
The surveyor grins:
“Here, rivers cross us first—
we are still catching up.”

They do not know
their laughter will be cited
in some future historian’s dissertation
as evidence of “informal ties,”
but the Road hears it,
files it beside a much older sound:
two traders in an oasis long gone
joking about the price of silk.

A programmer in Shenzhen
debugs code for a payment app
used in bazaars from Bishkek to Lahore.
Her screen is a new map,
nodes glowing where markets wake up.

When she hits “deploy,”
the update travels faster
than any horse, ship, or train—
yet she still chews the end of her pen,
worries if it will crash at the worst moment,
imagines a Uyghur spice seller in Kashgar
tapping his phone, frowning.

Progress is not a straight road;
it is a tapestry of glitches and grace.

I have worn many bodies.
I have been
hoof-mark, wheel rut, ship’s wake,
rail, runway, satellite path,
cable humming under frozen soil.

I have carried plague and paper money,
gunpowder and prayers,
silk that melted on tongues of royalty,
and ideas that refused to bow.

Men have tried to own me,
to inscribe me on maps with thick black pens,
to rename me in their speeches.
Let them talk.
I slip out between syllables.

I belong to the small stories:
a noodle recipe altered by foreign pepper,
a lullaby that crosses a mountain range,
a girl in Xi'an wearing earrings
shaped like tiny astrolabes
because some wandering star chart
entered her textbook and refused to leave.

I am the silence
after a business deal is signed
and both sides suddenly realize
they have entrusted each other
with pieces of their future.

Call me "Silk," if you like—
though now I am also glass and code,
steel and satellite, rumor and emoji.
My true material is *between-ness*:

the space in which a person
dares to step from familiar ground
onto a stranger's threshold,
hands empty,
heart loud.

So what is new, you ask,
in these New Tales of China's Silk Road?

Perhaps it is this:
once, only a few walked me—
merchants, envoys, monks, adventurers
whose names lined up in chronicles.

Now, millions move in micro-journeys:
thumbs swiping across screens,
voices crossing time zones in midnight calls,
students packing dictionaries
and dumplings in the same suitcase,
truck drivers learning playlists
in languages they don't yet speak.

A dancer in Almaty choreographs
to a remix of a Tang dynasty tune
and a West African beat.
Somewhere in London,
a boy of Shanghainese and Sudanese blood
writes fan fiction where dragon kings
ride freight trains through snow.

They may never think
“Silk Road” aloud,
yet they are the latest caravan,
bearing not spices
but hybrid selves.

Meanwhile, the old woman in Suzhou
finishes her cloth.
The pattern is strange:
city grids that melt into mountains,
binary that blooms into peonies,
camels morphing into bullet trains
into flocks of migrating words.

Her granddaughter holds it up, laughing,
posts a picture of it online
with a caption in Chinese, English, emoji.
Within hours
the image slides into timelines
in Jakarta, Cairo, Berlin, Lima—
a piece of cloth,
a scrap of dream.

Someone in a distant city
stops scrolling,
feels inexplicably homesick
for a place they have never seen:
a misted river, a creaking loom,
the hush before the shuttle flies.

If you listen at night,
you can still hear them—

ghost caravans pacing in the static
between radio stations,
camel bells spliced into the chime
of incoming messages,
sutras hiding
in the code of machine translations.

The Road is not a line;
it is a loom.
We are the threads
crossing and recrossing—

wool, silk, copper wire, photon;
story, surname, song, skin.

China is one spindle,
not the only one.
But from Chang'an's old bones
to Shanghai's electric veins,
from Kashgar's crowded alleys
to island ports where cranes blink like tired dragons,
a question keeps shimmering:

What can we weave
that was impossible before?

The answer is not yet written.
It waits in the calloused palm
offered across a bargaining table,
in the scholar's marginal note,
in a child's doodle of a train
on the back of a map of the world.

Take this, then,
as one small pattern—
a new tale stitched
to a very old name.

Hold it up to the light.
See how the colors refuse to stand still?
That is the only promise the Road has ever kept:

to go on,
to take us with it,
and to leave behind, in its vanished footprints,
just enough wonder
that we dare to follow.

Poetry – Group 4 WINNER

Silk of Stars, Bloods of Roads

Victoria Shanghai Academy, Rong Hao Regan Zhao – 16

I. Constellations

They leave Chang'an before dawn,
when even the roosters are only half-imagined
and market stalls drowse under their own shadows.

Bolts of silk, tight as unshed secrets,
lie stacked on the back of camels—
moonlight trapped in fabric,
colours no western sky has yet rehearsed.

No map exists, not really;
only rumours:
a valley shaped like a cupped hand,
a river that forgets its own name in summer,
a city where people drink milk from animals
no one in Chang'an has ever seen.

They go anyway.

Days lengthen into a white monotony of sand,
nights into domes so steeped in stars
that direction feels almost irrelevant.

Blisters crown their feet;
dust braids itself into their hair.
They learn the grammar of thirst,
the syntax of mirage.

At a nameless oasis where date-palms
comb the wind with slow, green fingers,
they meet traders from the far side of the world—
men smelling of salt and unfamiliar metals,
women whose bracelets chime with other alphabets.

Silk loosens from their bundles
and catches on foreign wrists;
in return, strange things arrive:

Glass that mimics water yet does not spill,
spices that taste of distant lightning,
stories about a sea so wide
a man can walk for months beside it
and still not see the opposite shore.

They realise, with a start,
that the road they thought they were making
has been waiting for centuries—
a faint, latent line
through desert, steppe and gorge,
needing only the weight of their footsteps
to blaze into being.

Behind them, Chang'an swells—
Lanterns, markets, manuscripts, music—
without knowing yet
that it has just become a hinge
between worlds that once imagined
they would never meet.

II. Reminiscing of faces
Centuries later, the old route thrums—
a braided artery of dust and ambition.

Caravans move like slow thunder,
loaded with porcelain, paper, gunpowder, jade;
returning with glass, grapes, carpets, stories,
a hundred version of "home"
spoken into the same wind.

At a mountain pass where clouds
tear themselves on the peaks,
a caravan halt becomes a marketplace of tongues.

A boy from a village near Samarkand
learns to eat with chopsticks
under the tolerant amusement
of an innkeeper from Gansu.

A Roman, ink still drying on his contracts,
is taught how to say "friend"
in a language his senate has never heard of.

A woman from a desert tribe
adds a new spice to her stew;
a crushed, fragrant thing from the south—
and the taste remakes her childhood.

No emperor decrees this.
No chronicle records the exact moment
a lullaby crosses a border,
or a proverb molts its vowels
to fit another mouth
Yet the transformation proliferate;
- alphabets leaning into each other
- pigments travelling farther than the hands that ground them,
- melodies shedding on rhythm, adopting another, and continuing west.
The road learns to carry not only goods
but possibility;
the idea that a stranger's sky
might hold a star that answers your own wishes.

Then, one year,
fewer caravans come.

Cities that once hungered for silk
turn inward, put in a state of limerence.
Wars redraw the air.
Ships, swollen with canvas,
begin to write a different geometry
across salt water.

The road does not protest.
It simply grows thin,
like an old scar fading
under newly tanned skin.

Sand folds over abandoned milestones;
watchtowers become homes for owls.

What remains is not the traffic
but the changes it left behind—
tea in a place that never knew its plant,
a pattern on a woven cloth
no one can quite trace back,
faces whose eyes resemble people
from the very far back
though no one recalls why.

III. Lattices of light

Another millennium turns.

The world glows at its own edges now—
coasts rimmed with electric constellations,
skies streaked with aluminium birds,
oceans stitched together
by cables that pulse with light.

Someone in Beijing
draws a line on a digital map;
ports, rails, highways, fiber—
a modern echo of that first wild conjecture
from Chang'an to "somewhere west."

They call it a new Silk Road,
though no camel will taste this dust.

Freight trains heave through snow in Kazakhstan,
containers stacked like mute, metal syllables;
in a control room,
a girl whose grandmother still tells stories
of dried apricots and caravan bells
watches their progress on a screen,
each train a small, glowing beetle
crawling toward Europe.

Far south, a port flares into relevance.
Cranes the height of temples
swing their long, mechanical necks,
lifting boxes whose contents
no dock worker will ever fully know.

Yet between the steel and statistics,
other journeys unfurl:

A Kenyan engineer in Chongqing
records the first snowfall of her life,
her laughter ghosting white in the air,
and sends the video home
to a village that has never owned winter.

A boy in Athens eats noodles
from a stall newly opened by a family
from inland China;
he cannot pronounce the dish,
but he dreams that night in flavours
no one in his ancestry has named.

Online, a student from Lisbon
practises Mandarin tones with a tutor in Xi'an,
their faces framed by the small, luminous rectangles
of each other's rooms—
posters, curtains, the ordinary debris of youth—
bridging centuries of imagined distance
with dropped connections and shared jokes.

The road has its substance;
from sand to steal,
from caravan bells to notification chimes;
but its old hunger remains:

to move not only silk and circuitry
but understanding,
to smuggle empathy across borders
in the unsearched pockets of everyday life.

It is not innocent.
No road that powerful ever is.
Contracts are signed in rooms
whose windows do not open.
Forests hesitate at the edge of new railways.
Some voices are amplified;
others dissolve in the glare.

Still, somewhere a child
traces these routes with a fingertip
on the bright skin of a classroom glove
and feels the same quiet astonishment
those first traders knew:

that the world is larger,
and closer
than anyone dared to hope.

Behind the numbers and speeches
walk ordinary people
with suitcases full of ordinary sorrows:
a language left behind,
a grandmother's recipe,
a photograph of a street
that might not exist when they return.

Threads thou become;
invisible, tensile, luminous—
braiding east to west and back again.

And far above
all the graphs and projects,
in some high, indifferent darkness,
stars go on spilling their cold silk
over desert, city, harbour, rail-yard—

reminding anyone who looks up
that every road humans have ever made,
of dust or data,
has been at heart,

a way of saying
to the other side of the horizon:

we are here;
we are willing to meet;
bring your stories.

Creative Writing: Poetry – Group 4 WINNER

The Gleaming Road

Yuet Wah College, Macau, Wong Pak Hou Paco – 16

I wake, in a prosperous land
A majestic metropolis they call Chang'an
Sunshine gilded the western gates
Weaving a thread which retold our fate

Then there rang the rolling of wheels
Of wagons we rode with a compass we'd wield
Behind us shrank the image of home
In front the lanterns of salesmen shone

Oh, winds they blew, yet we marched with effort
Scorched by the heat of the Gobi Desert
Each our own gods to whom we prayed,
Together, we hoped to live another day

Our lanterns led to a fire-lit oasis
Where steeds, seeds, beads and creeds were traded
A babel of tongues in a thriving marketplace
With silk, tea and porcelain in our customers' embrace

And far beyond our lands we traveled
From Africa to Europe, our stories unraveled
Their threads wove into our grand design
Making a tapestry where minds intertwined

At last, our caravan had turned east
We returned with newfound wisdom unleashed
Familiar streets hummed with a different tone
A transformative symphony our people had sewn

And through the years, our thread has spun
Enlightening our people, together as one
A two-way stream of skill and thought
A living spring for all we sought

I saw our paper framed a foreign word
Our compass guides a ship unheard
Our blooms take root in native soil
Our insights clear our minds embroiled

Now futures trace an iron way
To forge the brighter, shared today
A new silk map in fiber light
The stage on which the world unites

And now I wake, with open eyes
To see that brighter future rise
The Road we'd followed far and wide
Now gleams within our nation's pride

Poetry – Group 5 WINNER

The Silkworm

ESF Renaissance College, Anna Wheeler – 16

Baby; be a minute old–
Soon; before time runs thin again and you are
Twenty and one before me
My legacy a shawl draped onto you
Of the finest silk
A woman could spin
And it slips from you as you slip from me,
As time allows – as it has always done.

Your bare back glares
You blame me
'Our scapula is what is left of our wings,' I say
Yours are clipped.

Baby; do not want what I want
Should you want it – weave whatever worlds you want with it
Gorge yourself on glory
So far, so near, so close – not far enough
Grab at it with your tiny hands; squeeze it coarse and rough

By mealtime, you'll have outgrown your rags,
Learnt the ropes
You'll have emerged from your cocoon; silver at your back, already–

For the day you wish to weave what I weave;
Want what I want
Be who I'm not
Is the day, I am sure – time will stop.

I am a mother first;
My womb a semblance of union

I had not yet known of the cages I held so close to us
The bars looked like wine glasses in my hands;
The stem, a dagger
The chalice; my own round belly
That I took a sip out of, every high noon
You made me ache.

The stories we'd craft on the satin
Felt like the lullabies I'd sing
And Chang'an roared year after year
With the stories of our silk
The same silk spun to hate us;
That would tell the tale of the women who had come to continue in every wound;
Where pinprick after pinprick
Sharpened and stung in the same hisses of poison rebirth—
We bend to our looms again.
Take pride in it, like a pig with its belly full, harvested alive and well,
Ecstatic and breathing
Where we dance in our riches and slip on our coins

Baby; do not slip.

On your twenty-eighth day— you shed something.
A new skin, new life, something translucent
Your limp wings lay next to you in holographic whisper
Opalescent

Baby, I dreamt of you in miracles— salty shimmers, the croak of wood
And the ail of women you created
The sneer of sisterhood
The world beyond our window, and our city, and our roads;
And our feigned riches
Merely shaped by hoofprints; wheel tracks, footsteps
That fade away with every change in season, change in wind;

Baby, do not change again.

And I rest on my cushioned knees; still bruised
And I blink, and the hoofprints have changed
And a new era arrives
And I sink into the walls of this house
Where history is told in whispers far too thin
And women like me lay draped in our own skin
Too aged to be silk
Painfully human

The day I had to let my Baby go,
Out came a silkworm
Born from my womb
Coiled in my hands
My baby
Stillborn.

Creative Writing: Poetry – Group 5 WINNER

Silk Road

G.T. (Ellen Yeung) College, Chiu Long Tin Isaak – 16

All saints converge in the dynasty's heart,
Priceless treasures enticing merchants halt;
Boundless adventures await,
An errant choice seals a mortal's fate.

Along the dusty trails where camels tread,
Buddhist proselytes chant; their insight spread;
Sandwiched by mountains, girded around by sand,
Dormant cordyceps recovered by careful hands.

Skirting Tianshan, escarpments rise and test,
Bandits lie concealed; avalanches deny rest;
Precipitous cliffs, where scarlet ravines remain—
Baptized by fire, the plains stretch out again.

Westward the lutes of Persia sound and call,
Mythic lore and ballads echo through the hall;
Violet grapes and sumptuous cloth unfurl,
Treasures and tales from every distant world.

Along the deltas, rivulets braid east to west,
Halfway from Tang, halfway to Rome's behest;
Damascus blooms with roses in the air,
Aram's famed prose beneath the merchant prayer.

Across the mounts, the caravans reach shores,
Where Punic echoes haunt forgotten wars;
Cargo holds their names; the keels take pride—
They sail on perilous, shifting tides.

At last the odyssey finds its woven end,
Yet Silk Road trade and memory transcend;
Tea, porcelain, and stories westward send,
China's legacy rides the restless wind.

Poetry – Group 6 WINNER

The Luxury of Fur

Korean International School Springboard, Hung Wing Hung Iden – 13

Furs from the North, so soft and so rich,
Luxurious treasures that bring style and charm.
Silky and plush, with a glossy delight,
They wrap us in warmth, comfortable through the night.

Timeless and lavish, a true work of art,
Furs tell a story—each piece plays a part.
From chilly winters to lands far away,
They brighten our lives in a wonderful way.

Porcelain Treasures

Korean International School Springboard, Sung Sangeun – 13

Porcelain is classic,
Oh, so artistic—
A smooth treasure
That makes us whimsical.

It's radiant and refined,
A special find,
With fragile beauty
That dances in our mind.
Pristine and versatile,
It's a pretty sight.

From sophisticated to delicate,
It's used every day,
Bringing gloss and timeless charm
In a lovely way.

So here's to porcelain,
Elegant and durable,
A magical treasure
From a faraway land!

Poetry – Group 7 WINNER

One Voice Can Change the World

Korean International School Springboard, Damien Chor – 18

In ancient halls where whispers weave,
He didn't travel to Europe's shore, but eastward bound, to western routes explore.
A voice rang out, determined and brave.
With ink and brush, he dared to believe.

In Han Dynasty's time, beneath history's weight
He sought the truths that few could see
His wisdom shines through ages past
Through lessons wise, he showed the way to grow.
With pen in hand, he wrote with care,
He told his men of what was fair

Ban Chao, the brave, who took a stand.
His legacy across the land.
His cleverness shone through the silent nights.
With courage, he claimed his rights.
And the echoes of his voice were very strong.

For every voice, both loud and soft.
Can change the world and inspire all.

The strength in our voices, strong and clear.
For Ban Chao's legend will resound through time.
Each voice can find the strength to stay.
Transforming darkness into light.

The Silk

Korean International School Springboard, Taryn Liane Bi – 14

Silk, a treasure, luxurious and bright,
A craft of beauty, shimmering in light.
Soft and delicate, as light as a bird,
Worn by kings and queens with royalty.

Rich and flowing, with a glistening grace,
A journey unfolds, from China's embrace.
Through winding paths, to Europe it flows,
A legacy woven in history's prose.

Valuable Trades

Korean International School Springboard, Wong Jing Yuk Euan – 15

These precious treasures, gems, and gold,
Silver and vibrant stones, unique tales told.
Crafted by ancients, with skill and delight,
Radiant, sparkling, shimmering bright.
They enrich my journey, inviting and bold.

Precious metals and gems, billions of years old,
Zircon, the oldest, a wonder to behold.
Natural diamonds, formed in grandeur's embrace,
Rare and elusive, a captivating grace.
Priceless and exquisite, in nature's pure state.

Peridot and garnet, rich and bold
Sapphire's gleam, ruby's fiery glow,
Diamond's brilliance, jade's allure too.
Both metal and gold, in beauty entwined,
The vibrant gems danced on the Silk Road.

Chinese Poetry – Group 1 WINNER

时光

YK Pao School, Ju, Anna – 8

据站在西安的西市前, 遥想当年,
我多想加入张骞出使的队伍,
过黄河, 翻越祁连山, 十三载兜兜转转,
他是不是也没有想到自己会开辟一条商路,
而无功而返的结局会不会少一些遗憾。

五百年后, 莫高窟开凿了,
有飞天, 有九色鹿, 也有女娲、伏羲,
我仿佛听见了驼铃声声,
沙漠中的城市分外神秘。

又过了两百五十年,
有一个僧人悄悄从长安出发,
沿着丝绸之路一路西行, 然后往南,
他是否也曾预想到自己的西行取经路会如此艰难。

我多想坐上时光穿梭机,
逛一逛盛唐时长安的西市,
摸一摸远方运来的玻璃、玛瑙和香料,
还可以尝一尝那时刚运来的胡萝卜。

又仿佛看见章怀太子李贤，
看见他打马球时的身影，
还有在鸿胪寺前的意气风发，
《客使图》中的西域使者穿梭往来。

时光啊时光，
大雁塔如今还在屹立，
脆弱的贝叶经还安放在锦盒中。

Chinese Poetry – Group 2 WINNER

絲綢之路

LKWFSL Wòng Yiu Nam Primary School, Chan, Tsz Ham – 11

烈日熔金沙, 風刀刻浪紋。
駝鈴搖碎星辰, 在月牙灣裏沉。
仙人掌刺破寂寥, 向天空討一滴淚。
蜃樓是海市, 是遲遲不歸的船隊。

絲路

LKWFSL Wòng Yiu Nam Primary School, Huang, Zirui – 13

駝隊是大地鋪展的畫卷,
駝鈴搖碎了千年的長風,
每一步都碾過洪荒的寂寞,
每一聲都震落西域的繁星。

絲綢是長安載的月光,
是裹着茶香漫過的雪浪。
胡楊枝沿着高道流淌,
一夜間爬滿了敦煌的院牆。

黃沙是時光織的錦緞,
是樓蘭的傳說與長安的煙。

這絲路的線啊,
一頭繫着東方的日出,
一頭繫着西方的月圓。

Chinese Poetry – Group 3

WINNER

丝路融光

Dulwich College Beijing, Amiee Chen 陈墨古 – 14

微风拂起的沙尘像是为炽热的太阳掩上了一层若隐若现的面纱，
缥缈的骆铃叮叮当当的回响于耳畔，
骆驼驮着晚霞般绚烂的绸缎，
缓慢的走向那遥远的异域国土。
丝绸是一条流动的长河，
流过了河西走廊的残雪，将敦煌壁画上的飞天，轻轻裹进落日的余晖里，
流过了圣索菲亚大教堂，将马赛克镶嵌的圣象，悄悄融进金碧辉煌的穹顶，
流过了喧闹的波斯市集，将琉璃般的海蓝宝石，慢慢沉进仓流的历史长河，
也流过了每个人的记忆。
丝绸之路从来不是单向的脚印，
而是不同肤色的手，
共同托起，
一轮，
永不落的太阳。

網路短歌

Dulwich College Beijing, Richard Wang 汪嘉潜 – 13

昔时驼铃摇落霞，
长安西眺道无涯。
丝绸一络连欧亚，
明月千年照鞍花。
烽火曾燃万国梦，
驼峰载起九州茶。
而今华夏驭风起，
描绘山河万里华。

Chinese Poetry – Group 4

WINNER

絲路華章

YMCA of Hong Kong Christian College, Chan, Ming Wai Ruby – 16

絲路風光漢世延，綢綾濟澤遍塵寰。
之行萬里承薪傳，路向千里煥新顏。
千年世事多變改，年華流轉志仍堅。
不改開拓凌雲天，衰亡無跡續新篇。
前路再啟前人願，路向未來何加焉？

Chinese Poetry – Group 5

WINNER

絲路新傳奇

Yan Chai Hospital Law Chan Chor Si College, Zhou Lisha 周麗莎 – 18

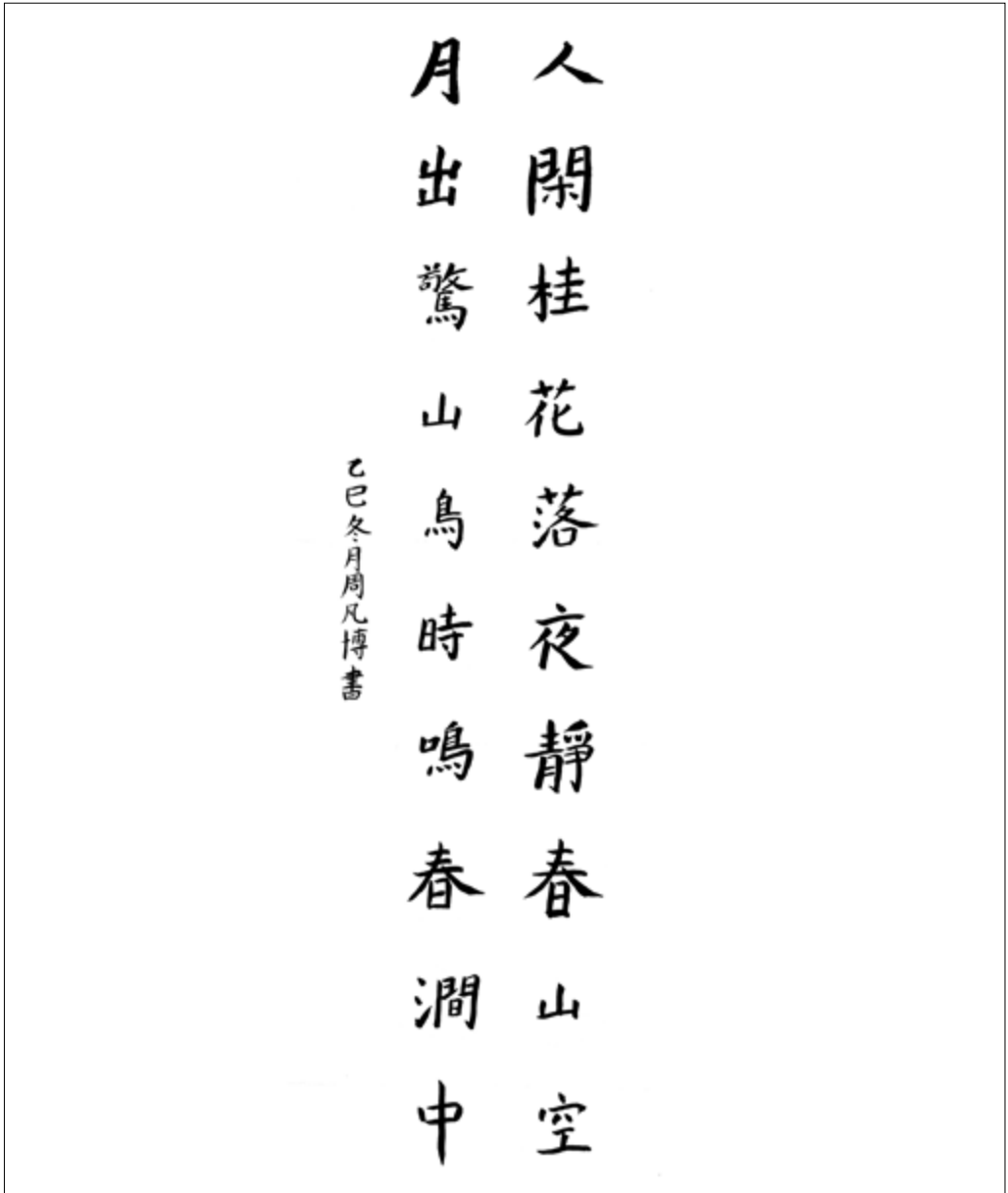
西洋萬里路茫茫，何處歸帆指故鄉。
一朝頓悟平生願，何必臨淵嘆渺茫。
寧使生前風雷蕩，不教身後草枯黃！
旌旗獵獵穿雲去，鼓角星星震八方。

一辭帝闕，初泛古里，烟濤萬里勇鏖戰。
二訪錫蘭，遠送華章，異域同沐錦帆暖。
三涉狂瀾，勇破礁群，南亞多國擒賊安。
四越南洋，直抵西洋，赤道風高浪拍岸。
五抵東非，木骨都束，萬國來朝異獸牽。
六復巡疆，再度重洋，四海盡識明舟瀚。
七返京華，鬢已生華，七航青史留宏願。
家鄉征途，史冊熔鑄，硝烟皆飄雲霧間。

誰料百年封海禁，絲綢蒙塵鎖銹箱。
英靈遙望長安路，恨見舟船臥淺塘。
何棄滄溟通萬國，空留奇策付殘章。
豈知帆影沉沙後，再無星槎向遠洋。

忽聞後世開新境，萬里滄波復通航。
商舶連檣馳遠島，笙歌繞郭慶安康。
綢緞揚起驚濤浪，捲着高鐵躍南航。
地圖攜手叩西洋，指向絲路拓遠方。
笑看人間春浩蕩，歸魂踏浪入蒼茫。
功過千秋留史筆，一身正氣貫穹蒼。
莫道海深天路遠，志存高遠即康莊。
當年若負明皇意，哪得聲名萬古揚？

Chinese Calligraphy – Group 2 WINNER



Chinese Calligraphy – Group 3
WINNER

明月出天山
蒼茫雲海間
長風吹度玉
關萬里

楊佳源

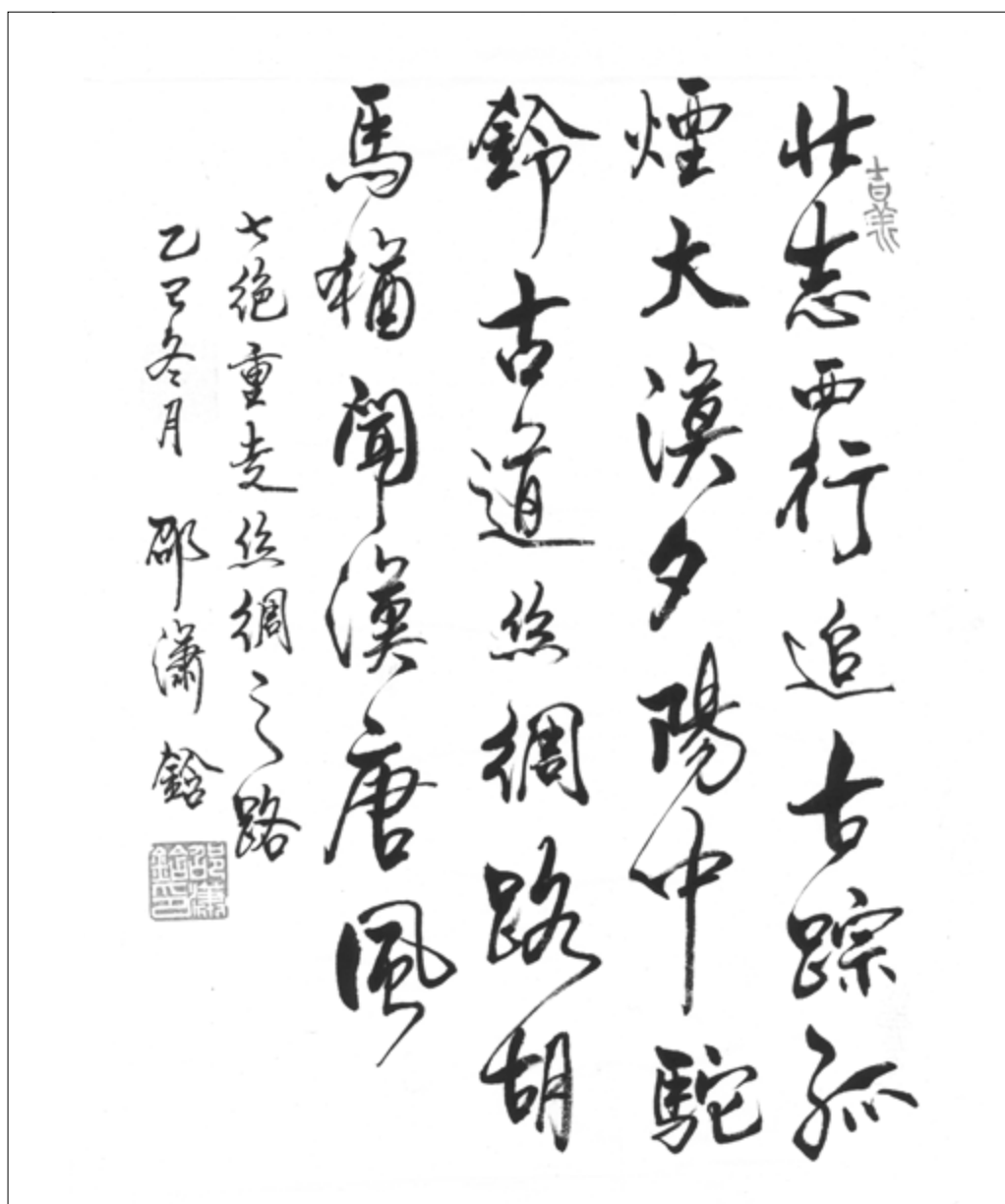


大漠孤煙直
長河落日圓
蕭關逢候騎
都護在燕然

王維詩一首 乙巳冬日 薛程銳



Chinese Calligraphy – Group 4 WINNER



The British International School, Puxi, Shanghai, Shao, Angelina He – 16