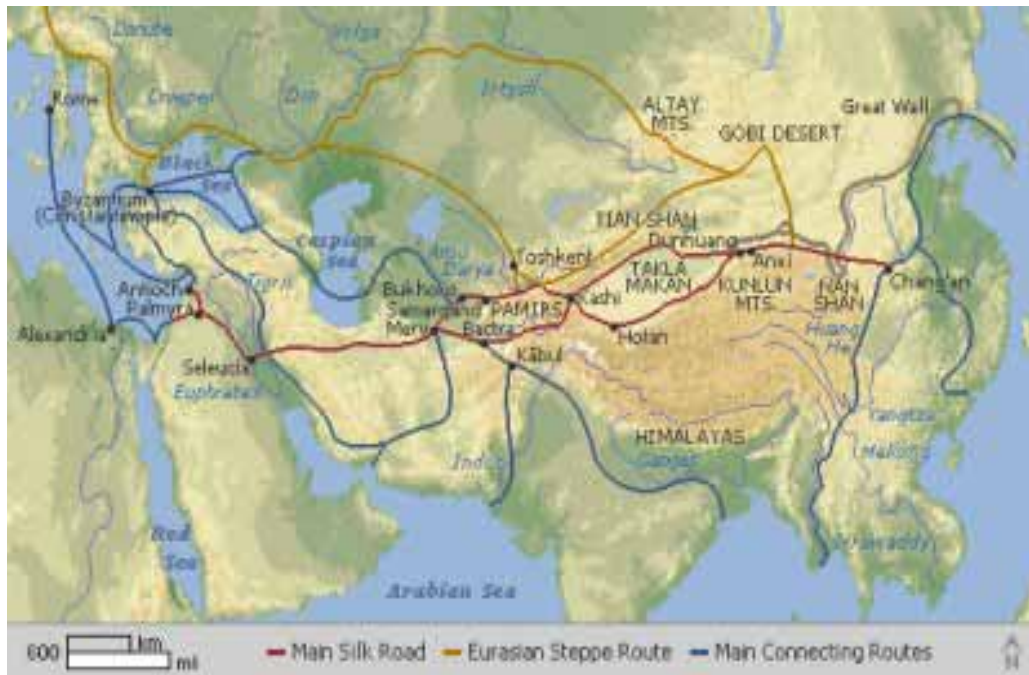


Special Section on Teaching the Silk Road

Editors' Note: Silk Road Studies represents a set of curricular and pedagogical initiatives that offer an innovative and fascinating approach to the way in which Asian Studies is conceived and taught. By dissolving the traditional geographical boundaries that East and Central Asia imply and through examining Asia through tools that promote true interdisciplinarity, students of Asian Studies are able to appreciate the ways in which Asian peoples have interacted with a holistic perspective that is new and exciting. The articles that follow focus upon the use of primary sources, geographical literacy, as well as study and travel experiences, as a means of enhancing students' understanding of the Silk Road. As Joan O'Mara in her excellent introductory piece notes, because Silk Road Studies resonates with our contemporary understandings of globalization trends, students find their relevance easy to appreciate. We trust that our readers will also find these articles to be of particular curricular and pedagogical interest.



Why Teach the Silk Road?

Joan O'Mara

Washington and Lee University

My interest in the Silk Road became serious in the summer of 2001, when I visited the Smithsonian-sponsored Silk Road Festival on the Mall, in Washington, D.C. At the time, I thought that the subject might be an ideal seminar topic for art history majors and East Asian Studies majors. I am the Asianist in the Art Department at Washington and Lee University, but my training and personal interests had led to a situation where my seminar-level courses all dealt with Japanese topics, and it seemed a good idea to develop a China-related course that could balance those other advanced offerings.

That first exposure led to participation in a CIEE faculty development seminar that took me to Xi'an, Dunhuang, Turfan, and as far west as Urumqi, in the summer of 2004. Subsequently, I participated in the 2006 NEH Summer Institute on the Silk Road that was held at the East-West Center of the University of Hawai'i at Manoa. Several participants in that NEH Institute joined me for a Roundtable session at the

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2007 ASIANetwork Conference, and essays by three of those speakers follow.

I did not need to be convinced of the importance of studying the Silk Road for art history when I took part in either program, and I was therefore surprised by the fact that, in 2004, I was the only art historian in a group of twenty-four on the study tour in northwest China. In Hawai'i last summer, I was one of only three art historians in a group similar in size. On the other hand, the interdisciplinary appeal and wide-ranging relevance of the topic were made clear by the participation in both programs of those who taught in a wide range of humanities and social science disciplines, and, in 2004, the group that traveled on the Silk Road even included a specialist in water purification projects. I have since taught Silk Road courses twice, once as an upper-level seminar on the Arts of the Silk Road and once, most recently, as a more broadly focused course for freshmen.

Silk Road and Eurocentrism

These experiences have combined to convince me that the Silk Road is, as it was historically, a broad venue for the accomplishment of many, varied purposes, not the least of which is introducing students to a more globalized view of the world than most of them have previously encountered. This was particularly true when the course was offered as a Freshman Seminar, and I realized that it could be, for students at the beginning of their college careers, an antidote to the largely

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Eurocentric world view with which they had been raised. Most of the students on most of our campuses have learned most of what they know about the history of the world, from faculty who have focused on Europe or the United States because that is how they themselves were trained.

Students learn about medieval codes of chivalry, including jousting matches

which would not have been possible without the prior introduction of the saddle and the stirrup from Asia. The invention of printing on paper, using movable type, is presented in the context of Gutenberg's Bible, without acknowledgment that paper, movable type, and the printing press originated in China. They study the history of warfare without recognizing the Asian origins of the crossbow, or the Chinese origins of gunpowder. They learn about the Age of Exploration without realizing that it probably could not have occurred, or would have occurred quite differently, had it not been for Chinese developments of nautical construction principles, the stern-post rudder, and the magnetic compass, all of which made oceanic navigation practicable.

The Silk Road—a 19th c. German term, *Silkenstrasse*—is a romantic name, one that will draw students into classes, where they can be exposed to a new, more globalized way of looking at the world. It is also a bit of a misnomer, however, because it is not a single road, and it was always about a lot more than silk. The term itself should be thought of as a decidedly Eurocentric one, and even for the Europeans, silk was only one of the commodities, highly sought after though it may have been, that made trade with Asia valuable to the European world. From its beginnings, the Chinese might as easily have called it the Horse Road because, for many centuries, horses of Arabian stock from Western lands were a principal object of Chinese trade across Asia.

The Maritime Silk Road

If we can expand the Silk Road terminology beyond the overland routes that dominated trade for well over a millennium following its beginnings early in the Han Dynasty, we should also speak of a maritime Silk Road, connecting Europe and its New World colonies, including the eventual United States, by way of sea routes to the port cities of India, Southeast Asia, and South China. In the latter region, it was especially the Portuguese city of Macao and the nearby port city of Guangzhou (or Canton, as it was known in the West), at the mouth of the Pearl River, that served later trade missions arriving by sea from

the Western world. There, those trading powers carried on a lively trade in, among other commodities, tea and export porcelain wares.

Porcelain was a desirable trade good, the secrets of whose manufacture were not yet understood in the Western world. How it was made was not discovered in Europe until 1707, in Meissen. Prior to that discovery, Chinese wares, and Japanese versions of those wares, were highly sought-after goods for European and American markets. Even after porcelain could be produced in the West, demand for Chinese and Japanese wares continued, and so did European appropriation of the designs on those wares, in versions now referred to as "*chinoiserie*."

Students looking at this later, maritime trade from the Eurocentric point of view most common in U.S. education, might focus on the tea trade in terms of its role in British colonial history, where British taxes on tea sent to the colonies, led to protests, most famously to the Boston Tea Party, and to claims of "taxation without representation."

This Eurocentric point of view misses two significant elements in the commodities trade involving the export of tea and porcelain from China: the return trade items of silver bullion and opium. More highly valued than gold by the Chinese, silver was a focal point of their trade with both the Portuguese and the Spaniards. Some silver bullion was obtained in Japan by the Portuguese, who loaded their annual "Black Ship" with silks in Macao, sailed northward to Nagasaki in Japan, and were paid for the silk with silver bullion, with which they returned to Macao. There, the silver was offloaded in exchange for porcelain and other goods for the return journey to Portugal. Less well-known today is the significant trans-Pacific exchange of silk and porcelain with the Spaniards, in which silver bullion was exported to China, via the Philippines, from Spanish colonies in the New World.

Once the British became involved in maritime trade with China, one of the things that they traded in exchange for tea and porcelain was opium. If trafficking in opium does not fit American stereotypical views about British propriety and moral rectitude, it was nonetheless an important corrective for the balance of trade, from the British point of view, because the British were passionate about both tea and

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Rhodes College

John F. Copper, Professor of International Studies, published *Taiwan's 2006 Metropolitan Mayoral and City Council Elections and the Politics of Corruption* in University of Maryland School of Law's Maryland Series in Contemporary Asian Studies.

Sewanee: The University of the South

D-Day in the Pacific: The Battle of Saipan (Indiana University Press, 2007), by **Harold Goldberg**, Chair of the Asian Studies Program, is now a featured choice for History Book Club and Military Book Club. The book also includes maps by **Daniel S. Backlund** of Sewanee's Theatre Department.

University of Redlands

Karen Derris (Religious Studies) and **Anne Cavender** (English), members of the Asian Studies Program Advisory Group, received tenure and were promoted to associate professor.

Why Teach the Silk Road? (continued from page 18)

porcelain, whereas the Chinese needed little that Britain could offer.

Importance of the Silk Road

Why is the Silk Road important? I have taught courses on the Silk Road twice, and the response of one student on an end-of-term course evaluation sums the situation up very effectively: "I had no idea." Such a course not necessarily the ones that I taught, but one that has in some way been generated by the Silk Road—offers a more globalized view of

the world that is far more appropriate at the beginning of the 21st century than the more Eurocentric view with which most of us were raised.

Another reason that studying the Silk Road is important is because students, like most Americans, have been so taken by surprise by China's recent economic resurgence. The past fifty years or so have taught them to think of China in terms of Mao's Communist Revolution, the Cold War, the Great Leap Forward, the Cultural Revolution, Tiananmen Square, and so on.

The China of the past decade, which has seen its modernization, the rise of capitalism and increasing dominance of world markets, and its new openness as Beijing looks forward to hosting the 2008 Summer Olympic Games—is startling to them, and perhaps puzzling, as well. An understanding of China's prominence in world economic markets over the preceding two millennia will put events of the past ten years, and the preceding fifty, into a valuable historical context, shedding light on both time periods.

Using Primary Sources to Teach the Silk Road (continued from page 20)

3) Xuanzang's Account

<http://depts.washington.edu/silkroad/texts/xuanzang.html>

Book 1 only with a cosmological description of the world and a catalog of countries mixed in with some stories. Nice description of Balkh, Bamiyan and Kapisa but pick and choose excerpts otherwise. The full account is available either as *The Great Tang Dynasty Record of Western Regions* or *Si Yu Ki: Buddhistic Records of the Western World* by "Huen Tsang". However *Journey to the West* is a fictionalized version of Xuanzang's travels with two versions available, one by Anthony Yu and another by W. J. F. Jenner. Yu's is supposed to be more faithful to the original language; Jenner's is more poetic from an English language standpoint. *Journey to the West* is itself 4 vols long and many prefer to have an abridged version called *Monkey*, by Arthur Waley which is back in print. There are two other abbreviated versions: Aaron Sheperd's *Monkey: A Superhero Tale of China* which is a children's book, and David Kherdian's *Monkey: A Journey To the West* which seems to have edited it down to the best action scenes.

4) Accounts of Mongols

Travels of Ch'ang Ch'un to the West

<http://depts.washington.edu/silkroad/texts/changchun.html>

Starts with really nice letter of invitation from Chinggis Khan and Ch'ang Ch'un is a DAOIST Monk! 21 pages. Really good descriptions of Mongol life pairs well with:

John Pian de Carpine's Account

<http://depts.washington.edu/silkroad/texts/carpini.html>

10 pages, with a great storyline and good images. and

William of Rubruck's Account

<http://depts.washington.edu/silkroad/texts/rubruck.html>

Dan Waugh's *Silk Road Seattle* has 63 pages, nicely bookmarked by topic. Really good descriptions of Mongol daily life and shows how cosmopolitan Karakorum was as well as the influence of Nestorians

John Pian de Carpine's account was originally published with William of

Rubrick's and you can get them in a package deal: Rana Saad, *William of Rubruck's Account of the Mongols*. The version by Peter Jackson, trans., *The Mission of Friar William of Rubruck*, which is supposed to be the definitive translation with the best annotations, is unfortunately out of print.

5) Ruy Gonzales di Cavilo's Account

<http://depts.washington.edu/silkroad/texts/clavijo/cltxt1.html>

The King of Castile sent him to Timur's (Tamerlane's) court in Samarkand. He has great descriptions of Timur and the book is easy to read, as it includes lush detail as well as good travel information. 31 pages on Dan Waugh's site.

Lastly, one favorite modern account from the Great Game period:

Sven Hedin, *My Life as an Explorer*, 560 pp. Listed as one of *National Geographic's* top travel adventures of all time. Be thrilled as Sven races through the desert, stealing artifacts, as one by one his men and a succession of horses, donkeys and camels fall prey to the elements or to bandits.