



DEVELOPMENTAL HISTORIOGRAPHY OF THE ANCIENT SILK ROAD

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ABSTRACT: *This study seeks to explain the history of the ancient Silk Road and also explain its strategic importance as a network of trade routes connecting China and the Far East with the Middle East and Europe. Using the library's documented instrument and historical descriptive methodology, findings show that the Silk Road is historically connected with the Eastern and Western civilizations and culture. Merchants on the Silk Road transported goods and traded at bazaars along the way. They traded goods such as silk, spices, tea, ivory, cotton, wool, precious metals, and ideas. The Silk Road also enabled cultural transfers, for instance when Genghis Khan and the Mongols invaded China, they came along with their own culture, e.g., buttons on clothes were introduced in China as a cultural import from Central Asia especially under the rule of Kublai Khan during the Yuan Dynasty. The paper concludes that the Silk Road rose to prominence during the Han and Tang dynasties. The long-distance trade at this time did not just transport goods and luxuries, it was also a lifeline of ideas and innovations from Persia, India and countries of the Middle East and Central Asia.*

KEYWORDS: Silk Road, Development, Historiography, Mongols, Yuan Dynasty, Bazaars.



INTRODUCTION

The Silk Road was a trans-Eurasian network of trade routes connecting East and Southeast Asia to Central Asia, India, Southwest Asia, the Mediterranean, and Southern Europe, which flourished from roughly 100 BCE to around. The ancient Silk Road was basically a network of passages for trade, people and cultures spanning over 8000 kilometers over land and sea. The earliest history of the Silk Road can be traced to the Han dynasty in China in 130 B.C. when it opened trade routes with the west. The Silk Road routes remained in use until 1453 A.D. when the Ottoman Empire boycotted trade with China and closed them. The Silk Road was very vital because it brought about trade and cultural exchange between different kingdoms and empires (Bentley, 1993). The Silk Road included land and sea routes that connected East Asia and Southeast Asia with South Asia, Persia, the Arabian Peninsula, the near East, East Africa and Southern Europe (Elisseff, 2001). The Venetian merchant explorer and writer, Marco Polo is famous for using the Silk Road to travel to China during the Yuan Dynasty (1271–1368). On his journeys, he described Chinese politics, culture and economy in detail which aroused the interest of other westerners to go to China (Feinstein, 2009).

It was called the Silk Road because of the popularity of the Chinese silk cloth which was a major commodity traded along this route. People throughout Asia and Europe placed a high value on Chinese silk for its softness and luxury. Silk contains a kind of natural fiber called silk fiber that makes it soft and glossy. Due to its quality of porosity, silk has good permeability and hygroscopicity, for which it is called “queen of fibre.” Clothes made of silk have good quality, not only heat dissipation but also heat preservation (Sutherland et al., 2013). The Chinese sold silk for thousands of years and even the Romans called China the land of silk. The origin of the name Silk Road can also be traced to the lucrative trade of silk first developed in China which served as a major reason for the trade routes which later evolved into an extensive transcontinental network. It derives from the German word ‘Seidenstrase’ which translates as Silk Road and was first popularized in 1877 by Ferdinand von Richtofen, a German traveler who made several expeditions to China (Elisseff, 2009). The first book titled “The Silk Road” was written by Swedish Geographer, Sven Hedin, in 1938 (Ball, 2016).

Conceptual Operationalization

Silk is a natural protein fibre which can be woven into textiles. This protein fibre is made up of fibroin and it is produced by an insect larva to form cocoons. The best-known silk is obtained from the cocoons of the larvae of mulberry silkworm (*bombyx mori*). Silk is produced by several insects but, generally, only the silk of moth caterpillars has been used for textile manufacturing (Sutherland et al., 2010). Silk is mainly produced by the larvae of insects undergoing complete metamorphosis, but some insects like raspy crickets and web spinners produce silk throughout their lives (Walker et al., 2012).

Silk Road: The Silk Road refers to the trans-Eurasian network of trade routes linking the East and the West, especially between the 2nd century BCE and 8th century CE. This route was central to the cultural, economic, political, and religious interactions between these regions (Eliseeff, 2001).

Trans-Eurasia: The term Eurasia refers to the continents of Europe and Asia combined primarily in the Northern and Eastern hemispheres. It spans from the British Isles and the Iberian Peninsula in the West to the Japanese archipelago in the East. The continental landmass



is bordered by the Atlantic Ocean in Africa to the West, the Pacific Ocean to the East, the Arctic Ocean to the North and by Africa, the Mediterranean Sea and the Indian Ocean to the South. The division between Europe and Asia as two continents is a historical social construct as there is no clear-cut physical separation between these two continents (Niels, 2012). The term trans-Eurasia simply means across, through or beyond the Eurasian continent.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This part will contain scholarly review of works and discussions by authors on the topic. The Silk Road was developed by Chinese exploration and conquest of Central Asia especially during the Han Dynasty (202 BC–220BC) especially after the “war of the heavenly horses” or the Han-Dauyan war between the Chinese-Han Dynasty and the Saka-ruled Greco-Bactrian kingdom (great Ionians) (Hogan, 2011). In the Fergana valley at the easternmost end of the former Persian empire (modern day Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan), the war was instigated by trade disputes brought about by geopolitics surrounding the Han-Xiongnu war, resulting in two Han military expeditions that eventuated in a decisive Han victory, allowing Han China to expand its hegemony deep into Central Asia (Benjamin, 2018).

Soon after the Roman conquest and conquest of Egypt in 30 BCE, regular communications and trade between China, Southeast Asia, India, the Middle East, Africa, and Europe flourished. The Roman Empire inherited the Eastern trade routes that were part of the Silk Road from the Hellenistic powers and the Arabs. The Roman Empire connected with the Central Asian Silk Road through their ports in Barygaza (known today as Bharuch) and Barbaricum (known today as the city of Karachi, Sindh, Pakistan) and continued along the western coast of India. The Roman Empire’s demand for Chinese silk blossomed this trade and economic relationship (Liu, 2010). The Byzantine Emperor Justinian (527–565), according to several accounts, sent two Nestorian Christian monks to China from Constantinople to uncover the way silk was made and steal the silk-worm eggs in silk production in the Mediterranean, particularly in Thrace in northern Greece, thereby giving the byzantine empire a monopoly on silk production in medieval Europe (Dresden, 1981).

Although the Silk Road was initially formulated during the reign of Emperor Wu of Han (141–87 BCE), it was reopened by the Tang Empire in 639 when Hou Jinji conquered the Western regions, and it remained open for almost four decades. It was closed after the Tibetans captured it in 678, but in 699, during Emperor Wu’s period, the Silk Road reopened when the Tang reconquered the Four Garrisons of Anxi originally installed in 640, once again connecting China directly to the West for land-based trade. The Tang captured the vital route through the Gilgit Valley from Tibet in 722, lost it to the Tibetans in 737, and regained it under the command of the Goguryeo-Korean General, Gao Xianzhi (Eberhard, 2005).

The Tang dynasty, along with Turkic allies, conquered and subdued Central Asia during the 640s and 650s. During Emperor Taizong's reign alone, large campaigns were launched against not only the Goturks, but also separate campaigns against the Tuyuhun, the Oasis state, and the Xueyantuo. After these conquests, the Tang dynasty fully controlled the Xiyu, which was the strategic location astride the Silk Road. This led the Tang dynasty to reopen the Silk Road with this portion named the Tang-Tubo Road (“Tang-Tibet Road”). The Tang dynasty established a second Pax Sinica, and the Silk Road reached its golden age, whereby Persian and Sogdian



merchants benefited from the commerce between the East and West. At the same time, the Chinese empire welcomed foreign cultures, making it very cosmopolitan in its urban centers (Kareem, 2009). The Sogdian dominated the East-West trade after the 4th century up to the 8th century, with Suyab and Talas ranking among their main centers in the north. They were the main caravan merchants of Central Asia. Their commercial interests were protected by the resurgent military power of the Goturks, whose empire has been described as "the joint enterprise of the Ashina clan and the Soghdians" (Dybo, 2007).

This is a period of cultural, economic, and scientific flourishing in the history of Islam. It dated from the 8th century to the 14th century. This period is traditionally understood to have begun during the reign of the Abbasid caliph Harun al-Rashid (786 to 809) with the inauguration of in Baghdad, the world's largest centre of cultural exchange (Dmitri, 1998). Textiles, spices and even religions were all exchanged along the Silk Road starting around 1000 B.C. and continuing for several millenniums. For much of this time, Islam was the dominant religion among Silk Road traders coming from Western Eurasia, and they brought with them their belief system and a culture rich in tradition and advancements to many people. Some earlier histories claim that Islam spread outside the Arab peninsula as early as the mid-seventh century; however, this was most likely not the case until at least a century later. According to Richard C. Foltz, the misconception stems from a misuse of the word Islam (submission), which was employed in Muslim history to denote the subordination of one clan to the authority of another, rather than the spread of the Islamic faith itself. In fact, it was the early Muslim clans' considerable success in gaining the obedience of other Arab groups that finally led to the establishment of the Islamic state. By the year 630, the majority of the Arab peninsula's clans had submitted and pledged their allegiance to the Muslim clans, forcing them to expand their raiding territory outside the Arabian Peninsula to Mesopotamia, Syria, and Egypt—regions controlled by Byzantium and Sassanian Persia. The Muslim clans had no issue ousting the Sassanian and Byzantine leadership and soldiers as they expanded into these lands (Folz, 1999).

The Muslims built Islamic administrations in the areas they conquered, and by the 660s, Damascus had an Islamic monarchy, the Umayyads. Other kingdoms ruled by Arab and non-Arab Muslim dynasties would come to control all lands from Spain in the West, through Northern Africa, across Persia and the entire Middle East, as far East as the Tang Empire's Tarim Basin, and crossing the Indus River into the Indian subcontinent by the year 750. The "Islamic Empire," as it was known at the time, was not a true empire because no central authority ruled over all of these regions (Lewis, 1987). The true Islamization of the Silk Routes did not begin until around the beginning of the 8th century. Initially, Muslims referred to their faith as "the Arab religion" (*al-din al-'arab*), and did not attempt to win converts. Though early Islam tried to transcend both class and racial distinctions, this goal was abandoned once the conquest of territories beyond the peninsula began in earnest. Keeping distinctions between ruling Muslims and conquered non-Muslims made for simpler governance, and guaranteed a privileged status for Muslims under the laws of the various Islamic states (Xinru, 1999). Maintaining divisions between governing Muslims and conquered non-Muslims made government easier, and secured Muslims a favored standing under the laws of various Islamic regimes (Lapidus, 1998).

The expansion throughout the Asian continent from around 1207 to 1360 helped bring political stability in the region and re-established the Silk Road. Kublai Khan was an able leader without his differences with the Chinese. Khan refurbished the Grand Canal and lengthened it 135 miles north to Beijing. He built paved routes next to the Grand Canal that ran from Hangzhou to



Beijing. Under Kublai Khan's reign, trade increased. Caravan routes were safe for travel and trade mainly because of the Mongol Peace. Chinese silk and porcelain were traded to Europe and Western Asia, which were greatly appreciated. Traders carried printing inventions, paper money, gun powder, compasses, and playing cards. Khan increased more trade by inviting foreign shopkeepers to travel to China. Most of these merchants were Muslims. The Mongol rule also brought an end to the dominance of the Islamic Caliphate over world trade. Because the Mongols came to control the trade routes, trade circulated throughout the region, though they never abandoned their nomadic lifestyle.

The Mongol monarchs desired to establish their capital on the Central Asian steppe, so after each conquest, they employed locals (traders, intellectuals, and artisans) to assist them in building and managing their empire. The Mongols built overland and maritime routes across the Eurasian continent, from the Black Sea to the Mediterranean in the West to the Indian Ocean in the South. Mongol-sponsored economic alliances developed in the Indian Ocean in the second half of the thirteenth century, connecting the Mongol Middle East and Mongol China. (Xinru, 2009). Marco Polo, a Venetian explorer, was one of the first Europeans to traverse the Silk Road to China at the same period. He also introduced Westerners to some of the Far East's customs (Enkhbold, 2019).

Attempts were made to construct a Franco-Mongol alliance in the 13th century, with an exchange of diplomats and (failed) military coordination in the Holy Land during the later crusades. After destroying the Abbasid and Ayyubid kingdoms, the Mongols in the Ilkhanate turned to Islam and signed the 1323 Treaty of Aleppo with the last Muslim state, the Egyptian Mamluks (Hays, 2005). According to some analyses, the Black Death, which ravaged Europe, beginning in the late 1340s, may have arrived in Europe via the Mongol Empire's trade routes from Central Asia (or China). One explanation holds that the disease was brought to Western Europe by Genoese traders from Trebizond in northern Turkey. Like many earlier plague outbreaks, there is significant evidence that it originated in marmots in Central Asia and was transferred westward to the Black Sea by Silk Road traders (Kelly, 2005).

Decline of the Silk Road

The Silk Road was maintained in China for hundreds of years and across multiple dynasties. However, as other civilizations became greater economically and technologically, China began to lose its economic and technological advantage in the ancient "arms race," resulting in the Silk Road's downfall. The Silk Road's demise was aided by the rise of maritime trade. Rather than crossing the long and often deadly Silk Road, it was now safer and faster to move commodities by ship. Another important cause of the Silk Road's demise was the spread of Islam which, like Buddhism, expanded quickly along the Silk Road. As Islamic power and territory encroached on China, ideas and communication became stifled, and tensions grew. The isolationist policies of the Ming Dynasty were the ultimate blow to the Silk Road's existence. China began to avoid trading throughout the Ming and Qing dynasties with the rapidly advancing West and also became a more oppressive state, ultimately ending the once prosperous and widespread trade (Hays, 2005).

The Silk Road's political, cultural, and economic cohesiveness was weakened by the Mongol Empire's disintegration. The Turkmeni marching lords captured land from the fading Byzantine Empire around the Western part of the Silk Road. Following the fall of the Mongol Empire, the Silk Road's great political powers became economically and culturally isolated. The loss of



nomad power accompanied the formation of regional states, partly as a result of the Black Death's devastation and partly as a result of the advance of sedentary civilizations equipped with gunpowder (Richards, 2018).

Silk Road Routes

- i. **Northern Route:** The northern route, which ran Northwest from Shaanxi Province through Gansu Province in China, was split into three sections, two of which followed mountain ranges to the North and South of the Taklamakan Desert before rejoining at Kashgar, and the other which went north of the Tian Shan mountains through Turpan, Talgar, and Almaty before rejoining at Kashgar (in what is now Southeast Kazakhstan). West of Kashgar, the routes divided again, with one branch traveling down the Alai Valley to Termez (modern Uzbekistan) and Balkh (Afghanistan), and the other through Kokand in the Fergana Valley to Termez (modern Uzbekistan) and then West over the Karakum Desert. Both routes joined the main Southern route before reaching ancient Merv, Turkmenistan. Another branch of the Northern route turned Northwest past the Aral Sea and North of the Caspian Sea, and then and to the Black Sea. The Northern route began in Chang 'an (now Xi'an), China's ancient capital, which was relocated to Luoyang during the later Han period (Ulric, 2006).

When Han Wudi put an end to persecution by nomadic tribes in the first century BCE, the route was determined. The Northern Silk Road was a caravan route that brought goods from all over the world to China, including "dates, saffron powder, and pistachio nuts from Persia; frankincense, aloes, and myrrh from Somalia; sandalwood from India; glass bottles from Egypt, and other expensive and desirable goods from all over the world." The caravans returned bolts of silk brocade, lacquer ware, and porcelain in recompense (Christian, 2000).

- ii. **Southern Route:** The Karakoram route, also known as the southern route, was primarily a single route from China across the Karakoram Mountains, where it still exists today as the Karakoram Highway, a paved road connecting Pakistan and China. It then headed West, with southerly spurs to allow people to complete the voyage by sea from various sites.

It proceeded across Northern Pakistan, over the Hindu Kush Mountains, and into Afghanistan, rejoining the Northern route at Merv, Turkmenistan, after crossing the high highlands. It followed an almost straight-line West from Merv across mountainous Northern Iran, Mesopotamia, and the Northern point of the Syrian Desert to the Levant, where Mediterranean commercial ships operated regular routes to Italy and road routes to either Anatolia or North Africa. Another branch route ran from Herat through Susa to Charax Spasinu at the mouth of the Persian Gulf, across to Petra, and on to Alexandria and other Eastern Mediterranean ports, where ships transported the commodities to Rome.

- iii. **Maritime Route:** The maritime section of the historic Silk Road connects China to Southeast Asia, the Indonesian archipelago, the Indian subcontinent, the Arabian Peninsula, Egypt, and finally Europe. The South China Sea, the Strait of Malacca, the Indian Ocean, the Gulf of Bengal, the Arabian Sea, the Persian Gulf, and the Red Sea were all included in the trading route. The maritime route intersects with historic



Southeast Asian maritime trade, spice trade, Indian Ocean trade, and the Arabian naval trade network after the 8th century. To connect China with the Korean Peninsula and the Japanese archipelago, the network was extended eastward to the East China Sea and Yellow Sea (Yang, 2008).

Influence of the Silk Road on Culture, Art and Religion

The historic Silk Road played a significant role in promoting cultural contact between China and the West. From the second century BC to the fifteenth century AD, this famed trade route exchanged brilliant civilizations between China, India, Greece, Persia, and Rome, making it a huge "Cultural Bridge" between Asia and Europe.

Impact of the Silk Road on Religion

Religions from the West were introduced into China via the world-famous route alongside commercial and political interchange between the East and the West. Buddhism, Zoroastrianism, Manicheism, Nestorianism, and Islam were ancient western cultural treasures handed upon China at the time (Xinru, 2010). According to Jerry H. Bentley, the diffusion of religions and cultural practices along the Silk Roads led to syncretism. The interaction between the Chinese and the Xiongnu nomads was one such example. As a result of these improbable cross-cultural encounters, both civilizations were able to adapt to each other as an alternative. Chinese agricultural skills, dress style, and lifestyle were adopted by the Xiongnu, while the Chinese adopted Xiongnu military techniques, some dress style, music, and dance. Chinese troops occasionally deserted and changed to the Xiongnu way of life, and stayed in the steppes for fear of punishment, which was perhaps the most startling aspect of the cultural interchange between China and the Xiongnu. Nomadic mobility played a key role in facilitating inter-regional contacts and cultural exchanges along the ancient Silk Roads (Jerry, 1993).

Christianity

On the Silk Road, the propagation of Christianity was known as Nestorianism. Nestorian Christian missionaries arrived on the Silk Road around 781; Christianity had moved East and West, bringing Syriac language and developing worship practices with it.

Buddhism

Buddhism began to spread throughout Southeast, East, and Central Asia during the 1st century; the three principal types of Buddhism that spread across Asia along the Silk Road are Mahayana, Theravada, and Tibetan Buddhism (Anderson, 2009).

In the history of world religions, the Buddhist movement was the first large-scale missionary activity. Chinese missionaries were able to adapt Buddhism to local Chinese Daoists to some level, bringing the two religions closer together. The Sangha, Buddha's community of followers, was made up of male and female monks as well as laypeople. These individuals traveled throughout India and abroad to spread Buddha's beliefs. As the Sangha's membership grew, it became more expensive, and only the larger cities could afford to have the Buddha and his disciples visit. Buddhism is thought to have spread to China and other countries of Asia under the Kushans' authority from the middle of the 1st century until the middle of the 3rd century. Large-scale connections began in the 2nd century, most likely as a result of the Kushan Empire's advance into Chinese territory in the Tarim Basin, owing to the missionary activities



of a large number of Buddhist monks to Chinese areas. Parthian, Kushan, Sogdian, and Kuchean were the earliest missionaries and translators of Buddhist scriptures into Chinese (Folz, 1999, pp. 37–58).

Displacement and warfare were two of the consequences of Buddhism's growth along the Silk Road. The Greek Seleucids were exiled to Iran and Central Asia at the beginning of the 2nd century BCE by a new Iranian dynasty known as the Parthians, and as a result, the Parthians became the new trade intermediaries at a time when the Romans were big silk clients. One of the first Buddhist text translations into the Chinese language was done by Parthian scholars. The city of Merv, which served as its principal commerce hub along the Silk Road, grew into a prominent Buddhist center by the middle of the 2nd century, while Buddhism in China matured (Folz, 199, p. 38).

Judaism

Following the Persian conquest of Babylon by Cyrus the Great's army in 559, Jewish believers began to migrate eastward from Mesopotamia. After the Persian conquest of Babylon, Judean slaves were emancipated and dispersed throughout the Persian Empire. Although there is no strong proof for this early Judean colony in Bactria and Sogdia, some Judeans may have moved as far east as Bactria and Sogdia. Most Judeans are thought to have engaged in trade after settlement. Judean merchants boosted their trading along the silk trade networks as the networks grew. Judean merchants in Central Asia would have been in a better position to participate in commerce along the Silk Road by the classical era, when trade items flowed from as far East as China to as far West as Rome. The Radanites, a group of Judean merchants who originated in Gaul, were one of the many Judean merchants who had lucrative trading networks stretching from China to Rome. This trade was made possible by the Radanites' ability to cultivate a positive connection with the Khazar Turks. The Khazar Turks considered a partnership with the Radanites as a promising trade opportunity because they were located halfway between China and Rome. Concepts of a paradise (heaven) for the righteous and a place of torment (hell) for the wicked, as well as a sort of world-ending apocalypse, emerged from Iranian religious concepts, as evidenced by the dearth of such notions in pre-exile Judean sources (Folz, 1998, p. 1–6).

The Silk Road became a crossroad for Iranian religions and Judaism, another ancient faith. The belief in one God, who revealed Himself to the people of Israel and made a covenant with them to live according to His will, as articulated in the Torah (the first five books of the Hebrew Bible) and concretized as Halakah, or "the way," was at the heart of Judaism's ancient oral and written traditions (Shaked, 1984).

Islam

Islamic scientific and medical advancements also had a significant impact on Silk Road travelers. Chinese Buddhist traders adopted Islamic medical knowledge in wound healing and urine analysis, according to Johan Elverskog in his book "Buddhism and Islam on the Silk Road." As Muslims traded in India, they also brought with them insights on astronomy including skepticism of the geocentric universal ideas found in Indian science coinciding with a period of heavy Islamic trade from the Silk Road.



Impact on Culture and Art

Many creative inspirations were transferred over the Silk Road, notably through Central Asia, where influences from Hellenistic, Iranian, Indian, and Chinese cultures could coexist. One of the most dramatic examples of this relationship is Greco-Buddhist art. Silk was also a religious symbol and a representation of art (Xinru, 2010, p. 10). Silk was, above all, employed as a medium of exchange along the Silk Road. These creative influences can be observed in the evolution of Buddhism, when, for example, in the Kushan period, Buddha was first represented as a human. This has been attributed to Greek influence by many researchers. Later Buddhist art in China and along the Silk Road countries contains a blend of Greek and Indian themes.

Art was made up of a variety of different products that were traded from East to West along the Silk Roads. The lapis lazuli, a blue stone with golden specks that was pounded into powder and used as paint, was a widespread product (Folz, 1999, p. 45).

Global Impacts of the Ancient Silk Road

The effect that the Silk Road had on trade at that time was massive; however, the impact it left on global trade and cross-cultural boundaries was even greater. The Silk Road was one of the most massive and encompassing trade routes connecting China, Europe, and Western Asia. It went along the northern borders of China, India, and Persia and ended up in Eastern Europe near today's Turkey and the Mediterranean Sea. It is hard to conceive where global technology would be now if the Silk Road did not exist. The Silk Road evolved from a route to a concept over time. It transformed the concept of transcontinental trade and, as a result, became the most important element in Eurasian trade. The Silk Road also came to symbolize Chinese superiority.

The greatest value of the Silk Road was the exchange of culture. Art, religion, philosophy, technology, language, science, architecture, and every other element of civilization was exchanged along these routes, carried with the commercial goods the merchants traded from country to country. The Silk Road was important because it helped to generate trade and commerce between a number of different kingdoms and empires (Elverskog, 2012). On the down side, the biggest disadvantage to the Silk Road is the spread of diseases. Measles, smallpox, and most importantly, the bubonic plague spread because of the Silk Road.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts the internationalist approach of regional integration to explain the importance of the ancient Silk Road in opening up transportation routes interactions, cultural relations and trade interactions and interdependence between East-Asia, South-Asia, middle East-Asia and Europe from the 2nd century BCE to 18th century CE. Internationalism is a political principle that encourages states and nations to cooperate more politically and economically. It is linked to various political ideas and movements, but it can also refer to a philosophy, belief system, or movement in and of itself (Khueul, 1986).

The internationalist theory is an offshoot of the liberalist school. The internationalists believe that integration will bring about cooperation and interdependence among nations (Sherriff, 2013). Internationalists believe that humanity should unite beyond national, political, cultural, racial, or class lines to pursue their shared objectives, or that governments should cooperate because their mutual long-term interests are more important than their short-term conflicts.



Some of the key proponents of this theory include: Woodrow Wilson, John Eikenberry, Daniel Deudney and Franklin D Roosevelt (Halliday, 1998, p. 187–198).

Major Assumptions of Internationalism

1. The goal of liberal internationalism is to achieve global structures within the international system that are inclined towards promoting a liberal world order.
2. It foresees a gradual transformation of world politics from anarchy to common institutions and the rule of law.
3. It emphasizes on global free trade, liberal economics and liberal political systems
4. Liberal internationalists are dedicated towards encouraging democracy to emerge globally.

In application, the internationalist liberal model can best explain how international trade, cultural exchanges, development of arts and religion flourished between empires and kingdoms for over 200 years from 400 BCE to 1600 AD. The Silk Road opened the road to EAST; traders from central Asia, south Asia and Europe flocked to China because of the demand for Chinese silk. This also opened up the trade route for trade in other commodities and ultimately led to cultural, religious and political exchanges.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Some of the major findings made in this research paper are as follows:

1. The ancient Silk Road emerged as a network of paths connecting civilizations in the East and West and was well traveled for approximately 1,400 years. Merchants on the Silk Road transported goods and traded at bazaars or caravanserai along the way. They traded goods such as silk, spices, etc.
2. The Silk Road arose during the westward expansion of China's Han Dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE), which forged trade networks throughout what are today the Central Asian countries of Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, as well as modern-day India and Pakistan to the South.
3. The Silk Road brought about economic and political exchanges between the East and the West. Religions of the west were introduced into China; Buddhism, Zoroastrian Manicheism, Nestorianism and Islam all came to China from its western frontiers.
4. The Silk Road stretches more than 7,000 kilometers, connecting most lands of Asia and Europe.
5. The Silk Road contributed immensely to global exchanges of culture, art, religion, philosophy, technology, language, science and architecture.



CONCLUSION

The Silk Road rose to prominence during the Han and Tang dynasties. The long-distance trade at this time did not just transport goods and luxuries, it was also a lifeline of ideas and innovations from Persia, India and countries of the Middle East and Central Asia. Furthermore, President Xi Jinping revived the idea of the historic silk route by creating the Belt and Road Initiative in 2013, shortly after becoming the Communist Party's leader and China's president. The aim was "to build a unified large market and make full use of both international and domestic markets, through cultural exchange and integration, to enhance mutual understanding and trust among member nations, resulting in an innovative pattern of capital inflows, talent pools, and technology databases." The Belt and Road Initiative aims to close the "infrastructure gap" between Asia-Pacific, Africa, Central and Eastern Europe, and hence has the potential to boost economic growth.

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