

Silk Road Footprints

Transnational Transmission
of Sacred Thoughts and
Historical Legacy

Edited by

David W. Kim

*Harvard University / Australian National University /
Kookmin University, Seoul, Korea*

Series in World History



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Cover design by Vernon Press. Background image by David W. Kim.

For Tammy, Rebekah, Harrison and Jaiden

This book offers a valuable and vibrant collection of essays, written by an international board of specialised scholars, on the Silk Road: a complex historical reality, but also the topos and locus of ongoing imaginary frames of ancient and more recent projections on this legendary connection between East and West.

Lionel Obadia
University of Lyon

What sets this volume unique is its scrupulous attention to geo-cultural perspectives on the landscapes of the Silk Road and its consideration of the impact of counter-cultural religions. Contributors offer critical analyses of the transmission of religious philosophies from the perspectives of Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, neo-Confucianism, and Protestantism as well as considering contemporary routes like China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). This volume sets a new course for Silk Road studies and is likely to have an enduring impact on the field.

Stephen D. Glazier
Yale University

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Introduction

The mystical narrative in the Hebrew tradition states that God's wrath destroyed all sexually corrupt and violent humanity (ten generations after Adam) as a result of their actions through a flood (Gen. 6: 13–9:29) (Thomas 2017, 120–127; Johnson 2008, 4). The new human races then began from the three sons of Noah: Shem, Ham, and Japheth. Scholars generally understand the descendants of Shem as Semites or people speaking Semitic languages, while the races in Asia Minor, the Aegean Sea (Greeks), and beyond link to Japheth. The offspring of Ham scattered around Egypt (Mandell 2020, 121–147). Regardless of the human origin based on the Masoretic text of the Old Testament, the initial human civilisations emerged around 4,000 and 3,500 BCE under the development of agriculture and trade (Baragli 2022, 161–281). Continuous cultural development occurred alongside major rivers and in areas with fertile soil, facilitating long-term settlements. Mesopotamia between the Euphrates and Tigris rivers (modern-day Iraq, Turkey, Syria, and Iran) is the 'Cradle of Civilisation' including Sumerians and Akkadians. The creative ideas of a 60-second minute and a 60-minute hour are great contributions even for modern days in astronomy and mathematics (Maisels 1993). The ancient Egyptian civilisation appeared from approximately 3,150 BCE (or earlier). The banks of the Nile provided such an environment in which the Old Kingdom of the Early Bronze Age, the Middle Kingdom of the Middle Bronze Age, and the New Kingdom of the Late Bronze Age left the various rich cultures of the hieroglyphic writing system, pyramids, the mummies, and the worship of deities (Selim 2023, 285–294; Moret 1998).

The Indus Valley Civilisation (alternatively, the Harappan civilisation and the Mohenjo-Daro civilisation) was around northwest India, Pakistan, and northeast Afghanistan from 2,600 BCE, along with the Indus River Basin and the Ghaggar-Hakra River (Dutt et al. 2018, 83–92; D'Agostini et al. 2023, 104783). They were skilful in measuring length, mass, time, and Buddhism and Hinduism religions. Anthropological and archaeological experts consider the Yellow River the beginning of the China civilisation from 2,700 BCE. The East Asian culture likewise produced or invented innovational technologies, goods, and religions, such as cannons, printing, alcohol, compass, paper, gunpowder, Confucianism, and Daoism (Guangkuo 2021, 114–134). The Maya civilisation was another one that prospered in Central America from around 2,600 BCE. The 19 million people enjoyed the invention of stone solar calendars, their writing system, and pyramids (Belli 2010; Lane 2022).¹

Although the earth's geographical landscape was less divided during the Neolithic periods of the Stone Age, each civilisation individually developed on

every continent except Antarctica. Yet, it wasn't until a certain time that cultural and economic trade began professionally. The Roman civilisation (753 BCE–476 CE) along the River Tiber on the Italian Peninsula is a key example of how the traditional concept of isolated civilisation has evolved into a more interconnected, transnational concept. Ancient Romans were a polytheistic people who used to worship multiple gods and goddesses, including Juno, Jupiter, and Minerva (Romanescu 2016, 7–14; Love 1991). Their advanced skills in military tactics, political systems, taxes, and social institutions made them well-known. The Mediterranean civilisation progressively conquered extensive lands in Europe and North Africa and established roads and aqueducts (Conant 2012; Sturzebecker 1985). The spread of the Latin language and Greek philosophy from approximately 200 BCE were some of the major cultural and ideological influences in the dominant regions, including Carthage, Upper Italy (Gallia Cisalpina), Sicily, Macedonia, Greece, Asia Minor, the Middle East, modern-day France, Britain, and Spain (Luttwak 2016).

In the pre-science era, the 'Silk Road (Chinese: 丝绸之路)' started to function as the first global highway (over 6,400 kilometres or 4,000 miles) where people with new ideas and new cultures made exchanges that shaped humanity. The European Association for the Study of Religion (EASR) conference at the University of Pisa, Italy, in 2021, had a special panel on the subject. The interdisciplinary section was successful, with positive feedback from anthropology, religion, sociology, literature, culture, international relations, politics, and trade scholars. The 'Silk Road' concept is often depicted just as a transnational network of trade routes connecting the West and the East from approximately 200 BCE to 1800 CE. While the economic, political, and cultural interactions usually refer to certain land routes (Mediterranean Sea, Middle East, and Central Asia), they also include sea routes that connect Asia, the Arabian Peninsula, East Africa, and Southern Europe. This new project (*Silk Road Footprints: Transnational Transmission of Sacred Thoughts and Historical Legacy*) is the creative consequence of the EASR Conference 2021 and scholars' interests in the critical and theoretical subject of cultural intersection. The socio-religious transformation of the West and the East has been previously explored through ancient, medieval, modern, and contemporary studies. The analysis of human movement draws from the various anthropological phenomena from South Asia to Southeast Asia, from the Himalayan borders (Afghanistan, Nepal, Tibet, Bhutan, China, Russia, and Sikkim), from China to South Asia, the South Pacific, and Africa, from Great Britain and the United States to China, from Bengal Bay to Central Asia, and from Morocco (North Africa) to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (Middle East). This book critically analyses the transmission of religious philosophy from the perspectives of Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, neo-Confucianism, and Protestantism. The contributors have also applied the hypothesis of sea and land routes to

contemporary China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in terms of historical trade legacy in the new volume.

As Silk Road research is one of the popular subjects in politico-economic exchange, there are already many sources to identify the significance and uniqueness of the commercial movements. The globalisation of colonialism and imperialism from the West to the East or from the East to the West is also relevant to the influence of previous Silk Road experiences and attendant strategies. For example, Susan Whitfield's *Life along the Silk Road* (1999) recounts the lives of 12 individuals who lived at different times. Whitfield extends geographical and chronological scope, considering the maritime links across the Indian Ocean and depicting the network of north-south routes from the Baltic to the Gulf. Elizabeth ten Grotenhuis and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery's *Along the Silk Road* (2002) explores another aspect of the history and contemporary status of the Silk Road; a trade network that connected Central Asia to East Asia and the Mediterranean from about the second century BCE to the fourteenth century.

Selcuk Esenbek's *Japan on the Silk Road: Encounters and Perspectives of Politics and Culture in Eurasia* (2017) provides a historical background indispensable for understanding Japan's current perspectives and policies in the vast area of Eurasia across the Middle East and Central Asia. Japanese diplomats, military officers, archaeologists, and linguists traversed the Silk Road, involving Japan in the Great Game and exploring ancient civilisations. Prajakti Kalra's *The Silk Road and the Political Economy of the Mongol Empire* (2018) compares the nature of present-day networks in the regions with the patterns of similar connections that existed at the time of the Mongol Empire in the thirteenth century (under the leadership of Temüjin or Genghis Khan (c.1162–1227)) and its successor states. It considers settlement patterns, technology and technology transfers, trade, political arrangements, religion's role, and the impact of the powerful states that border the region. Paul Amar's *The Tropical Silk Road: The Future of China in South America* (2022) likewise captures an epochal juncture of two of the world's most transformative processes in the contemporary era: the People's Republic of China's rapidly expanding sphere of influence across the global south and the disintegration of the Amazonian, Cerrado, and Andean biomes.

Nevertheless, a question remains underexplored by scholars: *How would sacred thoughts and their historical legacy be transmitted to other cultures and communities through the Silk Road routes?* This area of inquiry still lies largely concealed within the veil of research. The new book uniquely demonstrates the geocultural landscapes of the Silk Road and the fundamental functions of counter-cultural religion and/or spirituality through individual theories and methods. Among many religions, Buddhism was the first of the missionary

groups to take advantage of the mobility provided by the Silk Road to extend its reach far beyond its native soil. From its origins in north eastern India, it spread into the lands of Southeast and East Asia from the first century BCE. For contemporary society, the transcultural movement has reached the people of the North and Latin Americas and the European nations. Christianity transformed from Judaism in the first century (from 50 CE), from a local phenomenon in the Mediterranean region of Israel and Palestine to a rapidly expanding phenomenon. The establishment of Islam in neighbouring territories resulted from conquest in the seventh and eighth centuries of the Middle East. However, the spread occurred through preaching and conversion by scholars, merchants, and devout men and women. We elaborate on *Silk Road Footprints* from a socio-historical perspective of transnational globalisation, examining how religious cultures, sacred traditions, and ideological legacies promulgated across different regions of the world through the Silk Road. The local societies that adopted foreign teachings experienced a significant transformation in their cultural, social, and economic dimensions. For this project, the contributors are all specialists in their fields. Thus, the new book will be an innovative academic reference for those interested in cultural anthropology, history, geology, Silk Road studies, philosophy, religious studies, regional studies, education, maritime studies, and sociology.

In detail, the book comprises three parts—ancient and medieval, modern, and contemporary societies—in which the Silk Road ideology applies to the individual, community, or nation. The contributors interchangeably explore the socio-cultural subjects of the East and the West, such as Chinese history, the Sino-Arab relationship, the ancient Hindu-Buddhist polity of Central Asia, the Maritime Silk Road, the impact of Enlightenment philosophy and Christian ideals, the secret landscape of the ethnic Uyghur group, the upper Central Himalayan region of India, the perspective of a 'New Silk Road', and China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Part One has three chapters where each contributor attempts to interpret the individual subjects in the aspect of the ancient and medieval Silk Road. Chapter One (*Silk Route in Literature: Connecting People and Culture*) considers that the Silk Road was a network of ancient trade routes formally established during the Han Dynasty of China, which linked the regions of the ancient world in commerce from 130 BCE. It was not seen as a single route but as the 'Silk Routes.' The theoretical framework rests on the fundamental concepts of the Silk Route, which serves as a conceptual bridge facilitating the exchange of ideas and imaginings between the East and the West. Later, the geographical closeness and symbolic significance of its eastern terminus—China or the Zhongguo (the middle Kingdom) in Chinese—determined the fluidity of interactions along the Silk Route. The global picturisation of China traces its global presence as a cognitive line of understanding literature in the circulation of the global image within the framework. Suvro Parui presumes

that the parallel narratives behind the Silk Road reveal a specific convergence of the ideas of the 'global' and the 'planetary'. This chapter highlights Chinese cultural richness, literary trends, and the analysis and interpretative archetypes of culture.

Chapter Two (*The Chinese Silk Road as a Project for Opening-Up: A Case Study of the Arab Region*) discusses the origin of Sino-Arab connections. During the Eastern Han Dynasty (25–220 CE), there was an improvement in the Sino-Arab relationship, and China went through a time of stability; both of these factors contributed to an increase in trade. The Arab Peninsula served as a conduit for commercial and cultural interactions between China and other peoples and nations. This chapter demonstrates the interaction between Arabs and Chinese travellers along the old Silk Road. Mohamad Zreik addresses the following questions: What era and how did China-Arab relations develop? How did the Silk Road facilitate Sino-Arab cultural exchange in the past? On what aspects was the influence of Sino-Arab communication? The author claims that the ancient Silk Road positively impacted the communications between the Arabs and the Chinese. Evidence from relics reinforces this argument, whether in China or the Arabian Peninsula and historical writings that support the position. Chapter Three (*Navigating the Way to Shambhala*) analyses the religion of the Kālacakratāntra, one of the last innovations of tantric Buddhism in India in tracing its origins to the Central Asian kingdom of Shambhala. This chapter posits a new theory based on Sanskrit, Tibetan, and Chinese texts that the Kālacakra system initially had nothing to do with the Hindu Shambhala myth or Central Asia. Instead, the system's early proponents were active at the opposite end of the Buddhist world, in Maritime Asia. Iain Sinclair asserts that the switch to Shambhala occurred when Maritime Asia abruptly ceased to be the ideal tantric Buddhist haven from the 'barbarians' in the mid-1012s.

Part Two has three chapters where the international contributors approach the modern Silk Road aspect in different maritime and central Asian regions up to the first half of the twentieth century. Chapter Four (*On the Route of Zheng He: Revival of Maritime Silk Road*) introduces the works of General Zheng He, who led seven voyages across the South China Sea, the Arabian Sea, the Red Sea, and the coasts of East Africa in the fifteenth century. Acting under the royal order of the Chinese emperor, General He established economic and cultural linkages along this maritime route. Despite the narrative of the peaceful nature of Zheng's expeditions, there are indications that it involved gunboat diplomacy. The chapter then turns into the policy of Xi Jinping, the President of the People's Republic of China, who revived the historical legacy of the Maritime Silk Road (MRS) within the context of the BRI. China saw this initiative as an infrastructure project to set up nodal points across Oceania, Southeast Asia, the Persian Gulf, and the coast of East Africa. The narrative on the MRS rests upon the principles

of openness, cooperation, and inclusive development. However, Gökhan Tekir points out the critical reality that despite its rhetoric of support for mutual development, Xi Jinping's BRI ideology also involves debt trap diplomacy, setting up Chinese naval bases, and increasing regional expansion across the MRS route.

In a religio-anthropological approach, Chapter Five (*The Thought of War: Canton Merchants and the Philosophical Creation of the First Opium War*) examines the Canton Trade System as China's single trade channel with the West in 1757. Various economic histories have examined the resultant hub of international trade, but researchers have largely understudied it as a site of cultural exchange. The religious and ethical perspectives of the merchants guided business practices and set the stage for modern international relations between China and Western countries. The interactions between the Chinese Hong merchants, charged by their government to maintain a legal and profitable trade, merchants from the newly independent United States, and those from traditional European powers raise important questions: How much were these intellectual tensions responsible for the start of the First Opium War? How much were the individual merchants' religion and ethics responsible for their countries' responses to the First Opium War? This chapter explores the merchants' perspectives as vital and the key to understanding the reasons behind the war they created through lobbying their governments. Abby Fryman presumes that the impact of Enlightenment philosophy and Christian ideals commingled with Confucianism, which laid the foundations for defining fellow merchants as friends, barbarians, and interlopers.

Chapter Six (*Transmission vs. Termination of Cultures: The Cases of the Medieval Uyghurs and Modern Uyghurs*) regards the term 'Uyghur' referring to the ethnic group that comprises forty-five per cent of the population of China's Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region. They are closely related to the people of present-day Uzbekistan, which historically occupied multiple oasis cities stretching from Khotan and Aksu in the east, and historic Silk Road cities like Bukhara, Samarkand, and Kiva. The chapter shows the origin of the 'Uyghur' (Húihé 回紇 or 回鶻) nation that, from the mid-eighth to mid-ninth centuries CE, formed a khaganate (回國) that occupied the territory in and around what later became Greater Mongolia. Why are these modern Turks known as 'Uyghurs' if they ended up in the People's Republic of China and 'Uzbeks' if they became Soviet citizens? James D. Seymour considers that the policy of the Soviets after the Bolshevik Revolution (1917–1923) aimed to counter panTurkism. This action led them to differentiate the Eastern branch of the Turkic people from their Western counterparts. As a result, they established Uzbekistan, designating its inhabitants as 'Uzbeks'. This decision reflects the Soviet strategy to prevent the unification of Turkic peoples by creating distinct national identities. For the easterners, the Soviets had already decided to revive the ethnonym of the other

largely forgotten medieval people. The author maintains that during post-medieval times, the name was little heard until the 1920s, when the earlier Uighur nation and culture had long ceased to exist. As for the Uyghurs, they have accepted this modern ethnonym, but their culture's outlook is clouded.

Part Three comprises three chapters on the contemporary Silk Road from the viewpoint of Himalayan borders and its iconography, the historical perspectives of the 'New Silk Road', and China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Chapter Seven (*Constructing the Sacred in Liminal Spaces: Explorations on the Himalayan Borders*) interprets the Himalayas (Nepal, Bhutan, (Tibet) China, Pakistan and India) as home to some of the highest peaks in the world, but the rapid rivers flowing down have allowed passage for trade and travel, connecting peoples and cultures over millennia. Grassroots communities living on these mountains in the lap of nature have constructed their worldview and concepts of the sacred consonant with the environment's elements and the spiritual influences flowing in. In particular, the upper Central Himalayan region of India, on the geopolitical border separating India from China (occupied Tibet) is inhabited by small enclaves of communities having a broad generic reference locally embedded in specific ecological identities. The chapter demonstrates their primary occupation, crossborder trade, and connecting Tibet with the adjoining areas. In these border villages, the inhabitants perceive gods as living beings who live among them, directly influencing their lives as sovereigns, family members, and residents of their environment. Subhadra Mitra Channa supposes that elements from Hindu and Buddhist beliefs lead to an eclectic existence seamlessly flowing through the people's daily lives set in a sacred landscape imbued with consciousness. The chapter indicates that portraying the sacred as an ontological existence links these Himalayan communities to ancient belief systems, now largely superseded by doctrinal religions.

Chapter Eight (*Silk Road: Geographical Development in the Context of History and Future Perspectives of 'New Silk Road'*) highlights the geographical development of the Silk Road in the historical context of its development, leading to China's One Belt Silk Road Initiative. The evolution of the Silk Road through different periods reflects how religious and cultural aspects integrate with the Silk Road's geographical development. The chapter explores the impression of a 'New Silk Road,' and its future perspectives on land and the maritime road. It also mentions the initial time of China's Han Dynasty (206 BC–220 CE), with trade links all over Central Asia, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and the Republic of India. Faiza Mazhar's concern is that contemporary China struggles to increase and restructure the global order using the BRI. However, the author predicts that the New Silk Road project employing new techniques will permit the control of materials and transport networks in the dogmatic, commercial, and communal dominions over the huge spread of the initiative.

Chapter Nine (*China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in Central and Eastern European Countries*) demonstrates China's contemporary project of the BRI in Central and Eastern European countries (CEEC). The BRI economic and political cooperation framework embraces and connects the East Asian communist nation with the European Union. Many Central and Eastern Europeans of the EU joined the Asian flagship economic project under the '17+1' format: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Greece, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Montenegro, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, and Slovenia. The last chapter of the book tries to unveil how the twelve EU member states and five Balkan countries became serious partners in this economic platform. The empirical analysis of this study elucidates China's economic cooperation with CEE countries. Mukesh Shankar Bharti also answers, 'To what extent did the economic cooperation achieve success in the CEE countries?'

Thus, the Silk Road generally evokes images of places, cultures and peoples linked by exchanging exotic goods and fabled treasures. However, the notion of the subject often disregards the historical fact that the Silk Road routes functioned as a unique channel for trade and political benefits and the transnational spread of religious ideas, ethnic customs, and ideologies. The personal or community beliefs of the Silk Road changed radically due to the impact of external influences. The *Silk Road Footprints: Transnational Transmission of Sacred Thoughts and Historical Legacy* identifies the view that sacred communities interacted, coexisted, competed, and influenced each other over long periods. These include those local traditions and economics that evolved in ancient China, the Middle East, Africa, Central Asia, Southeast Asia, East Asia (including Korea and Japan), and the subsequent larger traditions that arose in the region—Judaism, Buddhism, Christianity, Shintoism, and Islam—and the shamanistic and animistic traditions of various nomadic peoples in the cross-cultural dimensions of politics, power, conquest, and assimilation.

The transcultural history of sacred thoughts and historical legacy along the Silk Road of human movements from around the Roman civilisation era (753 BCE–476 CE) is a remarkable illustration of how beliefs and civilisations often reflect the broad patterns of synthesis and transformation rather than clash. This text indicates that Asia (South, Southeast and East Asia, and China), one of the most pluralistic ethnic regions in the world, has become a centre of attention as a metaphysical bridge between culture and civilisation. The creative approach of the Silk Road and the ideological transmission evidence the implication that the local groups developed under a new environment of socio-sacred principles, exotic traditions, and political and economic influences.

Note

South America witnessed the Incan Civilisation (c. 300–1100 CE) around the regions of modern days' Ecuador, Peru, and Chile. They are recognised as outstanding builders, building fortifications and locations like Machu Picchu and the city of Cusco.

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