

# The silk road: its multicultural links and significance

[Economics](#), [Trade](#)



## **Trade and Cooperation**

Among the magnificent historical wonders, the Silk Road is of particular significance. This is the longest historical trade route starting from Far East and reaching up to Europe and East Africa. Actually, this is a network of trade routes intersecting each other at a number of nodes and passing through a large number of cultural regions of Eurasia and Northern Africa. Its peak flourishing period spans from about 100 BC to 1500 AD. The Silk is one of the many items that got traded throughout the route's length. Since the network of routes passes through a large number of geographically diverse regions where a multitude of cultures existed, the interaction of traders resulted in the creation of a number of multicultural complexes within the vast expanse of this network. The most prominent historical cultures along the route were Chinese, Indian, Iranian, Turkish, Arabian, Italian and Egyptian. It is believed that, apart from silk, metal, spices, artifacts, scents, dry fruits and other utility items were traded on the Route. But, the really, and historically important traded "things" were a diversity of cultural norms, religious knowledge, ideas, beliefs, customs, rituals, oral traditions, a spirit of mutual understanding and co-operation among a large number of ethnically diverse human populations.

## **Musical Culturalism**

Among the silk-route phenomena musical culturalism is of paramount importance. In the historical books we can find a long list of Chinese and Central Asian live performers and singers of their eras. The traders, pilgrims and travelers of this multi-pronged route spread their own musical traditions,

as part of their religion and cultural show-ups, and, en route, also absorbed the local musical influences. This resulted in the amalgamation of various musical practices.

In the modern time scenario of musical tradition of the Silk Road, we find another great unifying example in the musical ensemble crafted by Yo-Yo Ma and his fellow musicians. He has created a rainbow music having many colors of tradition and innovation based on the long history of the Silk Road cultures. One can feel a multi-cultural tinge of the long Silk Road in each different performance of the ensemble where a listener, who has some travelling experience along the Silk Road, feels himself on a journey ride passing close to various cultures in a live space-time.

### **Caravanserais**

Another long-flourishing and highly memorable tradition of the Silk Road is the array of Caravanserais built at different points on the vicinities of the long stretches of the Road to facilitate the travelers like the modern-day motels. When the travelers arrived in these Caravanserais they stayed there for a few days before their journeys onward. Here they exchanged their cherished ideas and journey experiences as well as historical stories of their native regions. This led to the interaction and exchange of mutual cultural traditions and religious beliefs. We have a fair history of the creation of many new languages as a result of centuries of such human interactions within the multi-cultural environments in these caravanserais situated at the innumerable nodal points of this Silk Route. This may be taken as a very lofty and significant legacy of the culture of these caravanserais. Moreover, these

caravanserais, with the passage of time, became intellectual and cultural crucibles and centers of new civilizations. A few examples of newly created cultural hubs, emerging from these caravanserais, created along the Silk Route, are: Dunhuang in China, Madras in India, Bukhara in Uzbekistan, Almaty in Kazakhstan, Balkh in Afghanistan, Ephesus in Turkey, Jeddah in Saudi Arabia and Aleppo in Syria.

## **Conclusion**

As a gist of what the Silk Road is or is not, I can cite a very fine quote by Colin Thubron, from his book "Shadow of the Silk Road": To follow the Silk Road is to follow a ghost. It flows through the heart of Asia, but it has officially vanished leaving behind the pattern of its restlessness: counterfeit borders, unmapped peoples. The road forks and wanders wherever you are. It is not a single way, but many: a web of choices."