

# Analysis of the book by xinru liu "silk and religion: an exploration of material ...

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In his book "Silk and Religion: An Exploration of Material Life and the Thought of People, AD 600-1200" Xinru Liu has made a significant research of impact of religion on silk trade in China, Central Asia, India, the eastern Mediterranean region and Western Europe in the early Middle Ages. Under Lui, at that time silk has turned from luxury item into a necessary commodity and, surprisingly, religion has impacted such change greatly. In his relatively short research Lui managed to gather outstanding evidence, including archeological, textual and documental proofs. In this paper I will try to analyze and dispute some of the Lui's arguments in order to find out, whether religion indeed had a decisive influence on silk trade. Early Middle Ages were really a time, when the religious map of the world has changed drastically.

Christianity and Islam have set themselves as global religions. Confucianism in China and Buddhism in and around India made significant steps towards domination in the minds of the peoples of those countries. The developing Christianity stepped away from its initial ideals of poverty. Spreading of Christianity from urban to rural areas resulted in mixing of Christian ideas with cults of local Gods and Goddesses, who were now replaced with. Relics, related to earthly life of the Saints became extremely popular with Christians.

Moreover, priests, who were becoming more and more numerous, wore ritual clothes, made of silk. Buddhism at the time experienced a shift from Hinayana to Mahayana Buddhism, which resulted in change of rituals.

Buddhas and bodhisattvas were now concerned with profit making and improving their own material conditions. Therefore, both in Christianity and <https://assignbuster.com/analysis-of-the-book-by-xinru-liu-silk-and-religion-an-exploration-of-material-life-and-the-thought-of-people-ad-600-1200/>

Buddhism the donations of silk became an integral part of religious ceremonies, thusly resulting in the increased role of silk as currency[1].

However, religious factor is at least not the only factor, which caused silk to become less expensive and thusly more available. Much more important was that silk was no longer a Chinese secret.

Since 500-s it has been produced in India, Central Asia and Byzantium. Under Tacitus, several silkworms have been stolen from China by mendicant friars[2]. Perhaps this can be in some way called religious influence, however, other versions exist how silk got to Byzantium and to the Arab world. Silk production emerged throughout Eurasia, destroying Chinese monopoly and reducing prices[3]. Since several regions were now producing silk, it started flowing not only outside China, but inside China as well, and the Chinese started wearing foreign silks.

Manufacturers within Tang China adopted methods of silk production, earlier applied in India and Central Asia. Artisans of China started producing two types of silk: warp-faced compound tabby silk, similar to the one, which has been produced on the West and premier polychromatic silks. The latter has been evaluated much higher and produced both for home market and export. Chinese producers also incorporated some Indian and Asian designs, such as bodhi tree and various animal motifs[4]. Rulers of Eurasia were very much concerned with silk production, trade and consumption, since, among other, silk played a symbolic role.

For example, in China only those who stood high in civil service and members of the imperial family had a right to wear clothes, made of

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polychromatic patterned silks. Special regulations were enforced to prevent traders, who bought and sold silk themselves, from wearing clothes, made of this material. In Byzantium the purple silk was associated with divine authority of the imperial power and the emperors carefully restricted the data, concerning technology of making purple dyes. Silk was used in international diplomacy as precious gift and granted right to wear silk to especially prominent religious leaders. In his book Lui reviewed more than a thousand silk samples, found in western churches and concluded that they were, undoubtedly, of Chinese origin, thusly proving evidences of active silk exchange between two civilizations[5]. Based on the overstated, it can be concluded, that religious element in silk trade did play an important role in the rising silk consumption, however, this role can hardly be recognized decisive.

Among other factors are the use of silk as global currency and it's importance as imperious symbol. Believably, there are two actual factors, which caused silk to become more available. The first is the loss of monopoly on silk production by China. Silks of different quality from different regions entered the market, increasing competition for market outlets. This caused silk producers to put their prices down. As a result, the second factor took effect: international exchange of silk became more intensive.

Combined together, those market factors made silk available to more people, turning it from luxury item into expensive, but available commodity.