

# Silk road change and continuity over time



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The Silk Road began in eastern Asia around 200 B. C. E. From there, it expanded and flourished over the next few centuries until it became outdated and fell to trade by sea. Stretching from China to parts of Western Europe, it was the most important trade route of its time. The economic system, goods traded, technology, religions prominent, and people in power varied over time. However the importance of silk along with other spices, the spread of ideas as well as disease, and the continuous diffusion of culture remained the same.

Many subtle transformations and changes occurred during this era, but the road still upheld its original purpose through it all. The main purpose of the Silk Road had been to deliver goods from place to place. Trade initially was completed using a barter system, so one area could get what it wanted by giving away the extras of what it had. Different empires could obtain resources that others were unable to produce. As wealth and the separation between classes became more prominent, luxury items were in much higher demand.

What began as necessities and small leisurely goods, transformed into high end products made for the upper class. The introduction to new goods along the Silk Road changed the way civilizations worked. The first money to be used was small gold and silver coins. They were understood to be worth a certain amount, and by using them to buy goods some empires set up an easier and more understandable way to trade. Slowly, the way the Silk Road's goods were bought changed. Instead of bartering and haggling for prices that were not previously determined and could change based on the customer.

With a more stable economic method, it was quicker and easier to live within one's means and know what they would get for a certain amount. As time went on, the empires and civilizations located along the Silk Road fluctuated. When it began, the Han Dynasty was in control of China. By its demise, five other dynasties had gained power for a period of time. One of the most golden periods for this trade route was the Yuan dynasty. Around 1279, foreign rulers known as the Mongols invaded China and took over. They then created the largest empire in world history.

Though they conquered by force, they were tolerant rulers. By letting their subjects keep their religion and cultural beliefs, they prevented violent uprisings. The Mongols set up armed forces along the Silk Road to protect it from burglars. When this dynasty fell, the Ming took over. Their views on the trade route shifted, and it was in this dynasty that it became obsolete. The Roman Empire fell in the late 400s B. C. E. and split into two halves. The Western half of Europe fell into a dark age and secluded themselves from most trade and advancement.

However, the Byzantine Empire contained one of the best trading capitals of its time. By continuing to import and export goods, the Byzantine Empire lasted for centuries after its other half collapsed. Different rulers had different points of view as to how the Silk Road should have been set up, and the variation was obvious as time went on. Each society comes with its own normalities and customs. The Silk Road ran through so many civilizations, that it was not unexpected for ideas and beliefs to travel. From early on, the culture of one place had been spread through to the next.

Trading figurines, manuscripts, and religious items often helped with this. Buddhism originated in India, but through the Silk Road it spread into China during times of chaos and disorder. Goods such as paper, silk, and gunpowder were spread into Western Europe to improve the technology already available to them. By keeping trade and diffusion alive, it left all of the empires to compete for the most advanced lifestyles. By taking one good and expanding on it, the civilizations all were able to keep adapting as time went on.

Obviously, one of the most important items traded along this route was Silk. This is what began it all. China discovered the secret of silk worms in the 27th century B. C. E. For a long time, they withheld the material from any other place in the world. It was only in China that you could wear or purchase silk, until they realized what a good economic opportunity it would be. This was the beginning of the Silk Road. By gaining a monopoly on this material, they were able to keep their goods in demand and maintain a very beneficial economic strategy.

Though other goods varied and became less desirable as time went on, silk was a constant along the trade route. The upper class in various empires desired to wear it to show their status to the rest of the population. By remaining a staple for trade, it provided a continuity throughout the era of the Silk Road. Since the beginning of technological advancements there has been the need to keep adapting and put out the next best thing. Over the course of nearly sixteen centuries, the goods traded along the Silk Road changed a multitude of times.

Things began small enough, and it was just the surpluses of things that one civilization did not need anymore to gain other necessities that could be found in empires short distances from their own. But as the route took off, so did the amount of commodities spread from one end of a continent to the other. The creation of paper changed the world forever. Now, government figures and inventors were able to record the history of their society in a much easier and manageable way. It led to more innovations and the ability to take down more information in a shorter period of time.

The printing press, which was an invention put out in the early eleventh century C. E. , was able to mass produce books and manuscripts to send along the trade route. With more knowledge available, it was easier to become educated even in the lower classes. Now, something that had been written about the Catholic Church in Western Europe could be spread along through the Middle East for the viewing of others. It was easier to learn about the culture of another empire, and more societies converted to a religion that they had read about or heard about on the Silk Road.