

# Silk road trade network analysis

[Transportation](#), [Road](#)



The Silk Road was a trade network that connected the East to the West on the Eurasian continent. This trade included both overland and maritime routes. The central Asian kingdoms and peoples became the nexus point for much of this trade which lasted from the 3rd century B. C. E. to the 15th century C. E. Many products and other cultural expressions moved along the Silk Road and diffused among various kingdoms along it. In breaking down and separating the patterns of interaction that occurred along the Silk Road from 200 B. C. E. to 1450 C. E. one can conclude that changes and continuities in these interactions included products traded (changes in specific products and impact, continuity in luxury goods), cultural expressions and diffusion (changes in artistic expressions and societal impacts, continuity in diffusion), and religion (changes in the religions that traveled and impact, continuity in spread of religion along the trade route ). One of the patterns of interaction along the Silk Road was in the products that were traded. The Silk Road trade system was created by interactions between Han China in the 2nd century B. C. E. and their western neighbors when an expedition for alliances to deal with a pesky neighbor turned into something else. The first product traded for on the Silk Road were Ferghana horses that the Chinese leader of the expedition Zhang Qian brought back with him which stimulated a trade between the Han and Central Asia for these fine war horses . In return, Central Asian kingdoms began to see various Chinese goods such as silk but also jades, medicinal herb, bronze and other luxury goods. This trade continued throughout the first four centuries of the timeframe with more groups getting involved in the lucrative trade.

Indian spices and cotton, European gold and silver, and Central Asian horses and camels all started being acquired by each other . With the fall of both the Han and Roman empires by the 476 CE, the trade declined due to less demand and merchant's fear of trading on less protected routes . The rise of the Tang Empire in the 7th century C. E. , along with a stabilized Byzantine empire in the West, led to a renewed vigor as well as the Abbasid caliphate in the Middle East led to stabilized trade routes again .

From the East, paper and porcelain begin to appear. The stirrup appears out of the Middle East and influences both Europe and China. In Europe it creates the medieval feudal knights because they can now stay seated and wield a long lance without fear of being unseated. A similar emphasis is put on heavy cavalry in China for the same reasons as Europe . Europe continues to export gold and silver from the West because it was what was valued heavily by eastern merchants as a medium of exchange (pretty much accepted everywhere ). By the 10th century C. E. China was in decline again under the Song dynasty and lost control over much of the central and northwestern parts of the trade route. They began to emphasize more the of the southern maritime routes and thus because of this invent the maritime compass that will make its way across to the West and later lead to an age of discovery with Portugal at the end of this timeframe circa 1450 C. E. beginning to search out another maritime route directly to Asia by exploring the African coast using Chinese inspired compasses and Islamic maps of the Indian Ocean .

With arrival of the Mongol conquests in the 1200s C. E. , once again the Silk Road has a sponsor to protect the merchants and trade thrives between East Asia, the Islamic Middle East and Europe . Silk, porcelain, and paper continue to come from the East along with gunpowder. Gunpowder now shows up on the Silk Road because of the Mongols taking it from China and using it in a more direct fashion in its conquests . Cannon now appear at the end of the timeframe being used by the Ottoman's in their conquest of Constantinople in 1453 and by the Portuguese on their caravel ships .

Central and South Asian products still include spices and animals but now cotton also begins to appear within the trade out of India . Because the Mongols controlled so much territory from China to Russia and the Middle East (they conquered Baghdad and overthrew the Abbasid caliphate), the Silk Road prospered like no other time and products flowed freely from East to West . A continuity throughout the timeframe was the fact that luxury goods usually drove the trade. Because products had to travel such great distances and thus there were so many middle men, only the very wealthy could partake of the trade .

That is why gold and silver were preferred exchange mediums for the trade of silk and other fine eastern products . Another pattern of interaction was cultural expression and diffusion . In the early part of the timeframe (200 B. C. E. -1450 CE), there was very little cultural influence occurring . This is because intermediaries carried on the trade between the Han and Roman empires and the two imperial powers really had no contact directly with each

other . During the Tang dynasty in the middle of the timeframe, this actually changes.

Persian dance and the game of polo are introduced in China as well as musical and clothing styles which become popular . Chinese paper influenced the Islamic and European medieval periods with written works now becoming more the norm in saving and transmitting cultural knowledge such as written bibles, histories, math and other intellectual discoveries . At the end of the timeframe during the 13th through 15th centuries the Mongols were instrumental in the dissemination of knowledge throughout the Middle East territory they controlled.

Islamic scholars in all fields have their works spread from Europe to China . In Europe, a Renaissance emerges due to reconnection to Silk Road trade because of the Crusades which began in the 10th century and continued into the 13th century. Crusaders reconnected with Eastern luxury goods such as spices and cloth but were also culturally influenced when they saw large vibrant, urban cities . It changed their outlook on life in general. Some ancient works such as the Greeks were re-introduced due to reconnection with the Byzantine Empire and the Abbasid caliphate .

Also eastern works were transmitted along the Silk Road thus inspiring Muslim and European scholars. The works of Ibn Battuta and Marco Polo become hits in Europe and the Muslim world because they opened the eyes of the people to the broader world that existed. Marco Polo actually traveled under protection of the Mongol Khan while Battuta traveled in the Muslim realm due to his being more comfortable in Arabic speaking kingdoms that

practiced his form of religion . The station of merchants also changed by the end of the period in China because of the Mongols.

During the Han period and other dynasties, Confucian principles kept merchants at the bottom the social hierarchy. Because the Mongols valued the profits they could generate, merchants under the Yuan period held much higher stations in life . A continuity in this period was the constant cultural diffusion that took place as intermediaries engaged one another and kingdoms became acquainted with each other. Lifestyles changed and peoples were introduced to new knowledge throughout the period.

Religion, art, and knowledge were continually diffused throughout the history of the Silk Road . The last pattern of interactions that was evident on the Silk Road was that of religion . Trade was a great disseminator of culture along the routes of trade and religion was one of those cultural traits that spread throughout the period. Three major religions spread along the Silk Road- Christianity, Buddhism and Islam . Buddhism appeared early on the Silk Road in roughly the first century B. C. E.

It was forced out of India due to its rejection by the Hindu majority but found homes in places like Tibet, China, Japan, and Southeast Asia . Many steppe peoples adopted it because it fit into their animistic religions of a universal spirit. Lower class people and women adopted it due to its equalitarian nature and its promise of an afterlife . It spread throughout the timeframe appearing in China and Japan during the Tang dynasty and being reinforced in places like Tibet and Mongolia when the Mongols adopted it .

Christianity also spread along the trade routes in Western Asia but was blocked from spreading any farther eastward than the Byzantine Empire due to the rise of Islam in the middle of the period during the 7th and 8th centuries . Because of the adoption of Islam by the Il-Khan khanate, Islam would make its way into southern China by the end of the period in the 14th and 15th centuries . Christianity and Buddhism were spread by missionaries while Islam was primarily spread by merchants and by the sword.

Buddhism as stated earlier continually spread throughout the period and found refuge primarily in Central, East, and Southeast Asia . It did not spread westward due to Islam and Christianity having hold on western Asia and Europe . In conclusion, there were several patterns of interaction on the Silk Road due to the many different cultures that interacted on it. It influenced cultural expressions, spread of religion, and as well as products and ideas that changed many cultures such as the stirrup and gunpowder to name a couple.

These interactions were not all positive however in that one of the byproducts of this trade led to the spread of bubonic plague from China to Europe. The Black Death as it was called in Europe is one of the reasons that Silk Road trade diminished as well as the isolationist policies of the Ming emperors who abhorred all things “ foreign” and the collapse of the Mongol empire due to internal fragmentation. Trade systems such as the trans-Saharan trade and the Indian Ocean maritime system had many of the same cultural impacts as the Silk Road and in total created early global networks of trade .