

The Legacy of the Silk Route: Connecting People and Cultures

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ABSTRACT

Routes have always remained historically important and analytically viable tools for grasping regional evolution. They create physical access and face to face contact which are basic factors necessary for understanding each other. Most of the present day world relations have originated through some prominent ancient trade routes in which Silk Route dominates. Owing to its periodicity, multidimensional influences, volumes of trade and bridging the gap among different cultures, this route became a complete communication system between different countries and regions and with the passage of time every stakeholder tried to develop link roads connecting with the main Silk Route at different locations. The Silk Route made a major contribution to the civilization of mankind, for besides merchants and their goods, there also moved along it the products of human thought, skill and migration. Craftspeople, scholars, entertainers, adventurers and emissaries from far lands travelled the Silk Route; many languages were spoken, and many cultures were blended, in glittering cities that grew up along it. Inevitably, this route formed a cultural causeway carrying new ideas, new philosophies and new artistic styles vast differences. The two-way transmission of science and technology was part of the reciprocal flow of ideas along the Silk Route. Out of China came the technologies like paper-making, explosive weapons, etc, which changed the Western world. In the backdrop of these introductory remarks present paper would be an attempt to highlight how different commodities and cultures were traded and diffused through this route. The paper also examines how different religions spread and also their relationships with each other and their various influences. It is in this context the present paper has been drafted.

Key Words : Cultures, Silk routes, Paper-making, Human thought, Communication system

INTRODUCTION

The ancient caravan routes of innermost Asia linking China with imperial Rome are collectively known as Silk Route.¹ It came into existence as the first trans-continental commercial and cultural route in the history of mankind,² connecting Europe, North and North East Africa, Russia, China,

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1. Warwick Ball, "Following the Mythical Road", Geographical Magazine, Vol.70, No.3, March Issue, 1998, p.18.
 2. Shams-ud-din, "The Silk Route" The Journal of Central Asian Studies, CCAS, K.U, VOL.XII NO.1, 2002, p.1.

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East Asia, Middle East and the Indian Sub-continent with one another through Central Asia.³ The term 'Silk Route' was derived from German word 'Seidenstrasse' coined for the first time in 1877 by the eminent German Geographer, Ferdinand von Richthofen, who made seven expeditions to China from 1868 to 1872.⁴ The Silk Route gets its name from the lucrative Chinese silk trade, a major reason for the connection of trade routes into an extensive transcontinental network.⁵

Origin of the Silk Route :

Long before the Silk Route was officially opened by the Han Emperor, Wu-di around 139 B.C, and silk was finding its way East and West of China.⁶ But the formal opening of full-length Silk Route to China is usually placed in the late 2nd century BC, and is attributed to Emperor Wu-Di of the Han dynasty who reigned from 1141 to 87 BC.⁷ The Silk Route threaded its many ages. The first was the long period of pre-history, when occasional contacts between migrating peoples resulted in exchange of goods. Archaeological discoveries in the last century provided clear evidence of connections across Asia from China in ancient times. Strands of Silk found in the hair of an Egyptian mummy dating from about 1000 BC⁸ and a gold cup with a richly embossed floral design, made somewhere in the Hellenistic world, unearthed in Siberia,⁹ discovery of Chinese Silk in a rich Celtic tomb of the 6th century BC in Germany¹⁰ and the excavation of Chinese Silk and bronze mirrors in the Scythian tombs of the Altai Mountains in southern Siberia dating from the 5th to about the 3rd century BC¹¹ are some facts proving the existence of the so-called Eurasian Steppe Road in ancient times. Since this road might often be disturbed by natural and human causes, it could not become the main channel of cultural communications between East and West.¹²

Functions of Silk Route :

Caravans have been travelling along the Silk Route for over 2000 years, and Chinese Silk was reaching Rome before the time of Christ. Ideas also travelled this route. Both Islam and Buddhism reached China by this route and some areas along Silk Route have important relics of those religions.

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3. Vadime Eliseeff, "Approaches Old and New to the Silk Roads" in the Silk Roads Highways of Culture and Commerce, UNESCO Publications, Paris, pp.1-2.
 4. Daniel Waugh, "Richthofen's Silk Roads: Toward the Archaeology of a Concept", *The Silk Road*, Vol.5, No.1, 2007, p.4.
 5. Daniel Waugh, "Richthofen's Silk Roads: Toward the Archaeology of a Concept", *The Silk Road*, Vol.5, No.1, 2007, p.4.
 6. Irene Good, "On the Question of Silk in Pre-Han Eurasia" *Antiquity*, Vol.1, XIX, NO.266, 1995
 7. John Lawton, *Silk, Scents, and Spice: Tracing the World's Great Trade Routes (The Silk Road, The Spice Route, The Incense Trail*, UNESCO Publications, Paris, 2004, p.13.
 8. Holoabek Lubec, "Use of Silk in Ancient Egypt, *Nature*, March, 1993, Issue.
 9. John Lawton, *Silk, Scents, and Spice: Tracing the World's Great Trade Routes (The Silk Road, The Spice Route, The Incense Trail*, UNESCO Publications, Paris, 2004, p.11-12.
 10. Jorg Biel, *Treasure from a Celtic Tomb* National Geographic, Vol.157, No.3, 1980, pp.428-38.
 11. Ivanovich, "On the Ancient Relations between China and the Tribes in the Altai" *Journal of Archaeology*, Vol.2, pp.37-48.
 12. Yang Juping, "Alexander the Great and the Emergence of the Silk Road", *The Silk Road*, Vol.6, No.2, The Silk Road Foundation, University of Washington (Seattle), Winter/Spring issue, p.15.

Various ideas from the East also reached the Islamic countries and sometimes Europe.

Trade Interaction :

Trade on the Silk Route was a significant factor in the development of the great civilizations of China, India, Ancient Egypt, Persia, Arabia and Ancient Rome, and in several respects helped lay the foundations for the modern world. Though Silk was certainly the major trade item from China, many other goods were traded, and various technologies, religions and philosophies travelled along the Silk Route. Some of the other goods traded included luxuries such as satin, hemp and other fine fabrics, musk, perfumes, spices, jewels, liquor ware, glassware, medicines, medicinal plants called rhubarb, and even slaves.¹³

China exported Silk, steel artifacts, spices, tea, precious metals and porcelain in exchanges for horses, jade, spices, herbal medicines and glass via the Silk Route to West Asia and the Mediterranean. While India traded ivory, textiles, precious stones, and pepper, and the Roman Empire exported gold, silver, fine glassware, wine, carpets, and jewels. The Uighur exported horses, jade, spices, herbal medicines and glass to China in exchange for Silk, steel artifacts, tea and precious metals via the Silk Route to Western Asia and the Mediterranean. Therefore, the trade and the cultural exchange facilitated by the Silk Route was a big part of heritage of Uighur Muslims. The Uighur merchants helped transmit the Chinese printing techniques to Europe and thus, this Muslim group played an important role not only in trade and also in East-West cultural and scientific exchange.¹⁴

Exchange of Ideas, Art and Technology :

The ancient Silk Road contributed greatly to the cultural exchange between China and the West. From the second century BC to the fifteenth century AD, splendid civilizations among China, India, Greece, Persia and Rome were exchanged along this famous trade route, making the route a great "Cultural Bridge" between Asia and Europe.

Perhaps the most lasting legacy of the Silk Roads has been their role in bringing cultures and peoples in contact with each other, and facilitating exchange between them. On a practical level, merchants had to learn the languages and customs of the countries they travelled through, in order to negotiate successfully. Cultural interaction was a vital aspect of material exchange. Moreover, many travelers ventured onto the Silk Roads in order to partake in this process of intellectual and cultural exchange that was taking place in cities along the routes. Knowledge about science, arts and literature, as well as crafts and technologies was shared across the Silk Roads, and in this way, languages, religions and cultures developed and influenced each other. One of the most famous technical advances to have been propagated worldwide by the Silk Roads was the technique of making paper, as well as the development of printing press technology. Similarly, irrigation systems across Central Asia share features that were spread by travelers who not only carried their own cultural knowledge, but also absorbed that of the societies in which they found themselves.

Silk Route was much more than a trade route. Above all, it was a great channel of communication a means of contact between peoples and places, and a conduit for the two-way transmission of art, religion and technology. By means of the Silk Route, dialogues were established between diverse

13. Francis Wood, *The Silk Road: Two Thousand Years in the Heart of Asia*, University of California Press, Berkely, 2002, pp.13-23.

14. Peter Yung, *Xinjiang: The Silk Road-Islam's Overland Route to China*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1986, pp.23-24.

peoples, new ideas disseminated and technologies transferred. Meanwhile as the pathway for conquering armies and mass migrations it helped shape the present political, ethnic and religious character of entire region.¹⁵

The Silk Route made a major contribution to the civilization of mankind, for besides merchants and their goods, there also moved along it the products of human thought, skill and imagination. Craftspeople, scholars, entertainers, adventures and emissaries from far lands travelled the Silk Route; many languages were spoken and many cultures were blended, in glittering cities that grew up along it. Inevitably, this route formed a cultural causeway carrying new ideas, new philosophies and new artistic vast distances.¹⁶ The two-way transmission of science and technology was part of the reciprocal flow of ideas along the Silk Route. Out of China came the technologies like paper-making, printing, explosive weapons etc., which changed the Western world. While from the West new developments in mathematics, medicine and astronomy spread to China.

Exchange of Religious Values :

The Silk Route has always been known as a trade route for material goods. Ideas were also an important commodity. Religious ideas pervaded nearly all aspects of the Silk Route. Richard Foltz, Xinru Liu and others have described how trading activities along the Silk Route over many centuries facilitated the transmission not just of goods but also ideas and culture, notably in the area of religions. As Xinru Liu notes: *“The eschatological concern so dominated philosophical thinking an deciding perspectives in life that it often guided people in earning, accumulating, spending, and exchanging their material wealth”*¹⁷

Buddhism, Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity, Manichaeism, and Islam all spread across Eurasia through trade networks, they were tied to specific religious communities and to their institutions.¹⁸ Islam beginning in the Middle East expanded into Central Asia and India, while Buddhism moved from India to China and Japan via the Silk Route. By this route Christianity, Manichaeism and Zoroastrianism spread vast distances from their original homelands, first through the activities of traders themselves, and later by travelers and missionaries.¹⁹

Buddhism :

During the 6th and 5th centuries BC, merchants played a large role in the spread of religion, particularly Buddhism. Merchants found the moral and ethical teachings of Buddhism to be an appealing alternative to previous religions. As a result, merchants supported Buddhist monasteries along the Silk Route and Buddhists in turn gave accommodation to the merchants to stay as they

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15. John Lawton, *Silk, Scents, and Spice: Tracing the World's Great Trade Routes (The Silk Road, The Spice Route, The Incense Trail*, UNESCO Publications, Paris, 2004, p.11.
 16. John Lawton, *Silk, Scents, and Spice: Tracing the World's Great Trade Routes (The Silk Road, The Spice Route, The Incense Trail*, UNESCO Publications, Paris, 2004, p.11.
 17. John Lawton, *Silk, Scents, and Spice: Tracing the World's Great Trade Routes (The Silk Road, The Spice Route, The Incense Trail*, UNESCO Publications, Paris, 2004, p.12.
 18. Xinru Liu, *Silk and Religion: An Exploration of Material Life and the thought of People (AD 600-1200)*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1996, p.2.
 19. Richard Foltz, *Religions of the Silk Road: Overland Trade and Cultural Exchange from Antiquity to the Fifteenth Century*, II Ed., Palgrave Macmillan, New York, pp.27-28.

travelled from one city to another. As a result, merchants spread Buddhism to foreign countries as they travelled. Merchants also helped to establish *lingua franca* and multiculturalism within the communities they encountered, especially in the oases like Merv, Bukhara, Samarkand, Kashgar, Khotan, Kuqa, Turpan, Dunhuang that served as lifeline of the Silk Route through Central Asia. Over the time their cultures became based on Buddhism. Because of this, these communities became centres of literacy and culture with well organized marketplaces, lodging, and storage.²⁰

The transmission of Buddhism to China via the Silk Route started in the 1st century AD with a semi-legendary account of an embassy sent to the West by the Chinese Emperor Ming (58-75 AD). Extensive contacts, however, started in the 2nd century AD, probably as a consequence of the expansion of the Kushan Empire into the Chinese territory of the Tarim Basin, with the missionary efforts of a great number of Central Asian Buddhist monks to Chinese lands.²¹

From the 4th century onward, Chinese pilgrims also started to travel on the Silk Route to India, the origin of Buddhism, by themselves in order to get improved access to the original scriptures, with Fa-hsien's pilgrimage (399-413 AD) through Dunhang, Khotan and then over the Himalayas, to Gandhara, Peshawar then India. Later Hsuan Tsang (629-645) travelled across Tarim Basin via Turfan, Kucha, Samarkand, Bactria, and then over the Hindu Kush to India. During 713 -741 AD Hwi Chao, a Chinese grown Korean monk, travelled to India via sea route and visited various Buddhist kingdoms in India, Persia and Afghanistan. On the returning journey, he travelled to Kashmir as well. Similarly another Chinese monk, Wu-Kung travelled India while he was returning home from Samarkand. During his travel (750-789 AD) he lived in Gandhara and Kashmir till returned to China.²²

Buddhism grew in importance during the 7th century with the Tang dynasty. During this time, Xuan Zhuang travelled to India to retrieve Buddhist scripture. With his return to China, Xuan built the Great Goose Pagoda, which contains over 600 scriptures that he obtained on his travels to India. He is still seen by the Chinese as an important influence in the development of Buddhism in China.²³ With the fall of Tang dynasty, the importance of the Silk Route began to decline, which in turn lead to the end of the transmission of Buddhism.²⁴ The advance of the Arabs to the West²⁵ and final conversion of the whole Taklamakan region to Islam lead to the disappearance of Buddhist civilization from the Silk Route.²⁶

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20. Richard Foltz, *Religions of the Silk Road: Overland Trade and Cultural Exchange from Antiquity to the Fifteenth Century*, II Ed., Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2010, pp.12.
 21. Jerry H. Bentley, *Old World Encounters: Cross Cultural Contacts and Exchanges in Pre-Modern Times*, Oxford University Press, New York, pp.43-48.
 22. Richard Foltz, *Religions of the Silk Road: Overland Trade and Cultural Exchange from Antiquity to the Fifteenth Century*, II Ed., Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2010, pp.37-58.
 23. Daniel C. Waugh and Lee Adela, "Ancient Silk Road Travelers", *The Silk Road Foundation*, University of Washington, online article, www.silkroad.com/artl/srtravelmain.shtml.
 24. Oliver Wild, "The Silk Road", par.28, (27 Oct.2001), online article. For more details, see <http://www.ess.uci.edu/oliver/silk/html>
 25. Peter Hopkrik, *Foreign Devils on Silk Road*, Oxford University Press, London, p.30.
 26. During the 8th century AD, a significant number of conversions to Islam began. G. Schimer,"Buddhism and its Expansion along the Silk Road," par.4, (27 Oct. 2001). Online article <http://www.schimer.com/silkroad/buddhism.html>.

Zoroastrianism :

Zoroastrianism was the dominant pre-Islamic religious tradition of the Iranian people. It spread throughout Iranian lands, into Central Asia along trade routes, and further into East Asia. The Seleucids, Parthians, Sasanians all practiced the faith.²⁷ The religion survived into the 21st century in isolated area of Iran, and is also practiced in some parts of India, particularly in Mumbai, by the descendants of Iranian immigrants known as *Parsis*.

Manichaeism :

During the 3rd and 4th centuries AD, beliefs of Manichaeism were transmitted along the Silk Route. They are the follower's of Mani. They dress in their religious white robes and they pay respect to Mani, the originator of Manichean. Mani's teaching is based on "dualistic view of the universe, in which "good" is equated with spirit and "evil" with matter".

Mani was raised in a religious environment with Christian and Jewish ideas. He received revelations from god at the age of twelve and twenty-four in his country, Iran. He decided to take the path to Kushan, India for a preaching mission. In Kushan, where Buddhism had played a significant role; also, Buddhism had become part of the formation of Manichean. With the same way as the Buddhist community, the Manichaeian group was divided into monks and lay followers.²⁸

The Manichaeian texts were translated into various languages by a group of Sogdians. Sogdians in the Silk Road were successful merchants with strong linguistic skills. They had translated the Manichaeian texts into Syriac, Middle Persian, Turkish, and Chinese. One of the texts, The Sutra of the Two Principles had become an influential Manichaeian work in China. An acknowledgment gives to the Iranian Manichaeian missionary, Mihr-Ormazd, who journeyed to China in the seventh century for the spreading of Manichaeian's ideas.²⁹ The reason for the spread of Manichaeism was less a matter of conscious proselytism (convertism) then hatred and dislike from prosecution in Persia. However, Manichaeism flourished along the Silk Route for only a short period of time.³⁰

Judaism :

It is unknown just how the Judaism spread to China. It entered China when Kaifeng was the capital of China probably in the late 8th or early 9th century, as a result of traders and merchants along the Silk Route. Having arrived the sea, Jews as well as Arabs traded together in the South at Canton (Guangzhou) and, no doubt, also in the north, in the Chinese capital of Chang'an, when they arrived overland from Central Asia and Persia.³¹ Kaifeng in the Henan province has been the home of the largest community of Chinese Jews. Their religious beliefs and almost all the customs

27. Victor Mair, "Old Sinitic Myag, old Persian Magus, and English Magician," *Early China*, Vol.15, Dartmouth Collge Hanover, US, 1990, pp.27-47.

28. Richard Foltz, *Religions of the Silk Road: Overland Trade and Cultural Exchange from Antiquity to the Fifteenth Century*, II Ed., Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2010, pp.71-72.

29. Richard Foltz, *Religions of the Silk Road: Overland Trade and Cultural Exchange from Antiquity to the Fifteenth Century*, II Ed., Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2010, pp.78.

30. Christoph Baumer, *Southern Silk Road: In the Footsteps of Sir Aurel and Sven Hedin*, Orchid Press, Bangkok, 2000, pp.50-51.

31. Irene Eiber, "Overland and By Sea: Eight Centuries of the Jewish Presence in China," *Chinese Journal of International Law*, Vol.4, No.1, Oxford University Press, June Issue, 2005, pp.235-56.

associated with them have died out, yet the descendants of the original Jews still consider themselves Jewish. The presence of Jewish communities in Merv is also proven by Jewish writings on tombs from the 5th and 6th centuries, uncovered between 1954 and 1956.³²

Christianity :

Christianity began to make a brief appearance on the Silk Route around 432 AD. During this time, the Roman Catholic Church banned the Nestorian sect of Christianity in Europe, so the Nestorian beliefs fled towards the East. Nestorian Christianity spread to Persia, India, and China, bringing with it the Syriac language and script (the basis of the writing systems of several Central Asian languages); a famous inscribed stela (standing stone tablet) in Xi'an, dated 781, commemorates the official arrival of Nestorian missionaries in China. By that time, Nestorian churches were to be found in cities all along the Silk Road, though there were undoubtedly many fewer Christians than Buddhists in Central Asia. Merchants helped transmit Christian beliefs along the Silk Route, and in 638 the first Nestorian Church was created in Changan. Evidence of Nestorian Christian writings can be found in cave temples at Dunhuang.³³

Spread of Islam :

The first introduction of Islam into Central Asia happened by Arab invaders in the 7th century AD, during the Tang dynasty, since then the relation between Arabs and Chinese flourished.³⁴ From the perspective of the Islamic Empires, the Arab conquest of the Iranian plateau was to control Central Asia, where the key trade situations of the Silk Route were located.³⁵ Arab traders navigated ships to China along the Gulf, India and Maylon Peninsula to Guangzhou and other Chinese Empires coastal cities. Later, the coastal navigation had been largely replaced by the overland route via the Silk Route through Persia, Xinjiang and the Chinese capital of Changan (considered the point of departure of the Silk Route).³⁶ Thus, the contact and trade between the two civilizations led to the beginnings of integration of Islam in Central China.

Before the introduction of Islam, Xinjiang was largely dominated by Buddhism, Zoroastrianism, Manichaeism, Nestorian Christianity, as well as Daoism and Confucianism.³⁷ But with the success of trade via the Silk Route Islam began to flourish in the region. Aside from the constant cultural interaction between the Chinese and Muslim Arab traders who came to Xinjiang, Uyghur merchants travelled to Arabia in the late 10th century, became converted to Islam, and returned to spread the new faith in Xinjiang.³⁸ There was then a two-way interaction facilitated by the Silk Route where

32. Pinkhsaov & Kalontarov, *A History and Culture of the Bukhtarian Jews*, Roshnoyi Light New York, 2007, p.10.

33. Oliver Wild, "The Silk Road", par.26, (27 Oct.2001), online article. For more details, see <http://www.ess.uci.edu/oliver/silk/html>

34. Ludmila and Malashenko, *Islam in Central Asia*, Ithaca Press, England, 1994, pp.12.

35. Xinru Liu, "A Silk Road Legacy: The Spread of Buddhism and Islam", *Journal of World History*, Vol.22, No.1, March Issue, University of Hawaii, 2011, pp.64.

36. Peter Yung, *Xinjiang: The Silk Road-Islam's Overland Route to China*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1986, p.21.

37. Peter Morrison, "Islam in Xinjiang", *Religion, State and Society*, Vol.13, No.3, p.224.

38. Peter Yung, *Xinjiang: The Silk Road-Islam's Overland Route to China*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1986, p.21.

merchants of each civilization were free to travel along the route and which allowed for further adaption of Islam in the Central Asian region. With Buddhism and Islam coming into contact for the first time in early 8th century the two religious traditions maintained a certain accord due to valuable trade routes in the area.³⁹

Arab invasion into Central Asia did occur, and the acceptance of Islam into Xinjiang was not always a peaceful process of trade.⁴⁰ Different scholars provide different views regarding the entry of Islam into Central Asia. Richard Foltz cites two main reasons for the spread of Islam into Central Asia. The first factor was concerned with politics. As the government supported Islam, it was easier to accept the government's rule rather than go against it. The second noted factor was economic, as it was easy to conduct trade with the local businessman as a Muslim rather than Buddhist because they (Muslims) were usually treated better.⁴¹ Therefore, the expansion of Islam into Central Asia did not come from the need to convert the peoples into Islam, and was instead heavily centered on economical issues.⁴² The economy that the Silk Route provided then facilitated Xinjiang as a main connection point that linked the Arab and Chinese civilizations.

In the 12th century, long after the first contact between Islam and Central Asia, the Arabs finally dispatched Muslim missionaries to China to increase Islamic expansion. These missionaries entered Xinjiang through Kashgar, and helped to spread Islam to Yarkand and Khotan.⁴³ By the 15th century, most of Central Asia had been converted to Islam and it had become the religion of the entire Taklamakan region.⁴⁴

The spread of religions and cultural traditions along the Silk Route also led to syncretism. One example was the encounter with the Chinese and Xiong-nu nomads. These unlikely events of cross-cultural contact allowed both cultures to adapt to each other as an alternative. The Xiong-nu adopted Chinese agricultural techniques, dress style, and lifestyle. On the other hand, the Chinese adopted Xiong-nu military techniques, some dress style, and music and dance.⁴⁵

In addition to religion, Islamic scientific and medical advancements also had significant impact on Silk Road travelers. Chinese Buddhist traders adopted Islamic medical knowledge in wound healing and urine analysis, according to Johan Elverskog in his book "Buddhism and Islam on the Silk Road." As Muslims traded in India, they also brought with them insights on astronomy including skepticism of the geocentric universe — ideas found in Indian science coinciding with a period of heavy Islamic trade from the Silk Road.

While trading along the Silk Road, Muslims developed the first true "global brand" in their production and widespread distribution of exquisite blue and white porcelain. While they most likely

39. Johan Elverskog, *Buddhism and Islam on the Silk Road*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 2010, p.44.

40. Polanskaya and Malashenko, p.10.

41. Richard Foltz, *Religions of the Silk Road: Overland Trade and Cultural Exchange from Antiquity to the Fifteenth Century*, II Ed., Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2010, pp.96-97.

42. Peter Yung, *Xinjiang: The Silk Road-Islam's Overland Route to China*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1986, p.21.

43. Peter Yung, *Xinjiang: The Silk Road-Islam's Overland Route to China*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1986, p.21.

44. Peter Hopkirk, *Foreign Devils on Silk Road*, Oxford University Press, London, p.31.

45. Jerry Bentley, p.30.

borrowed techniques from the Chinese, it was the Muslims who found commercial success as art traders, Elverskog writes. Music was also a chief Islamic export, especially among Sufi Muslims whose holy men or religious storytellers used chanting, singing and instrumental music to win converts from the audiences at the Silk Road's tea houses and bazaars.

The cultural interchange of the Silk Road worked both ways, and influences from Buddhist China and other regions affected radical changes in Islam. The most notable change, according to Elverskog, occurred in the 12th century when abstract Islamic art suddenly started depicting human figures, long considered forbidden by Qur'anic law. It is largely thanks to Muslim artists' experience of Buddhist statues and Indian narrative artwork encountered on the Silk Road that mosques started appearing with representational murals, and Islamic art exploded with new techniques and figures.

Conclusion :

The Silk Route was one of the most crucial routes for conducting trade and exchanging culture. The Silk Route also made a major contribution to the civilization of mankind, for besides merchants and their goods, there also moved along it the products of human thought, skill and migration. The Silk Road not only established civilizations in the past but made a major contribution to the economy and culture of Asia. Today, many historic buildings and monuments still stand, marking the passage of the Silk Roads through caravanserais, ports and cities. However, the long-standing and ongoing legacy of this remarkable network is reflected in the many distinct but interconnected cultures, languages, customs and religions that have developed over millennia along these routes. The passage of merchants and travelers of many different nationalities resulted not only in commercial exchange but in a continuous and widespread process of cultural interaction. As such, from their early, exploratory origins, the Silk Roads developed to become a driving force in the formation of diverse societies across Eurasia and far beyond.

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