



中國傳媒大學
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Institute for a Community
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The Historical Connectivity between the Belt & Road Initiative (BRI) and the old Silk Route traditions



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The Creation of Silk Road

Silk Road development took time. Cultural exchange, trade, and idea exchange influenced it for millennia. Asia's archaic civilizations started everything. One of the first civilizations to cultivate land and form towns was Mesopotamia between the Tigris and Euphrates. This location became a commercial hub as traders brought food, metals, and textiles from far and wide. After the Persian Empire acquired power, the Silk Road trade took off. Warlike Persians invaded west and east Egypt and India. They developed roads and infrastructure to trade and travel between distant countries.

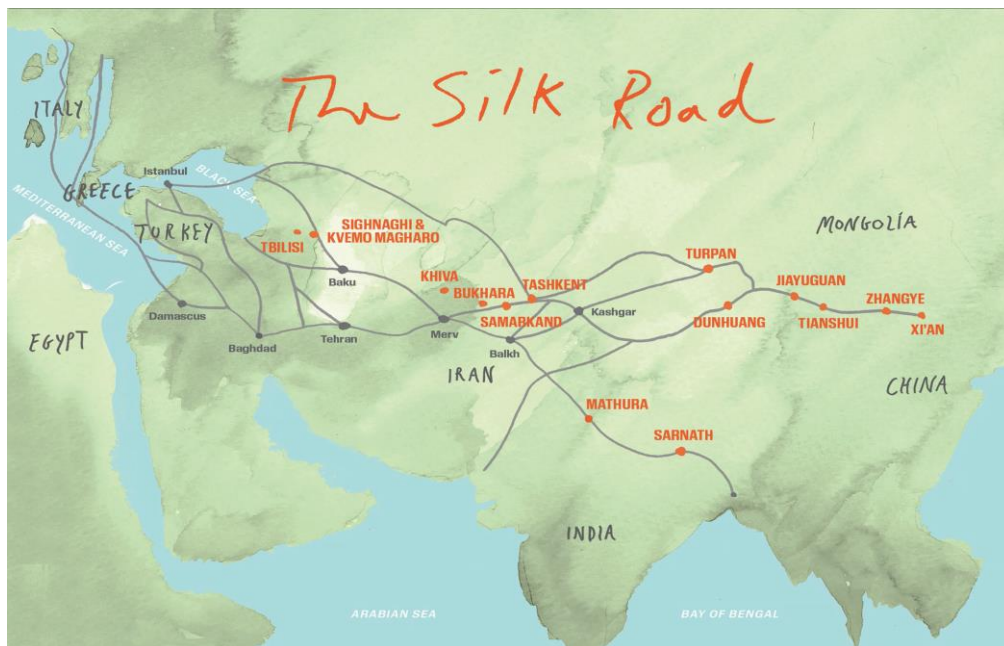


Source: *The Silk Roads: A New History of the World* (Peter Frankopan)

“Silk”, manufactured from silkworm cocoons, was a popular item. The Chinese hid silk-making for millennia. Tea, porcelain, spices, and silk arrived later in the west. Instead of a single route across Central Asia, the “Silk Road” connected China to the Mediterranean. These channels connected merchants from different cultures to exchange goods and ideas. Caravanning through meadows, mountains, and deserts was difficult.

Trade on the Silk Road went beyond buying and selling. It propelled technology, knowledge, and relationships. Cultures shared ideas, improving arts, sciences, and agriculture. Languages, religions, and practices broadened cultures. The Han Dynasty in China and the Roman Empire in the west dominated Silk Road trade. Trade increased roadside cities' economies rapidly. However, Silk Road risks existed. Pirates, natural disasters, and political unrest jeopardised traders' goods.

The Silk Road survived these hurdles for millennia until marine trade channels arose during the Age of Exploration. Sea routes to Asia disrupted trade patterns, and the Silk Road vanished. Heritage of the Silk Road carries on in national cultures. It shows how trade unifies and shapes history.



The Silk Road: The Route That Made the World



Peter Frankopan's Narrative on Silk Road

Peter Frankopan emphasises the Silk Road's geopolitical and cultural significance beyond trade. He claims that the Silk Road spread ideas, philosophies, technology, and cultural practices between East and West, influencing world history. Frankopan stresses the Silk Road's dynamic nature as a region where many civilizations interacted rather than just being a commercial route. Central Asia was a crossroads where people from different backgrounds traded goods and languages, which he emphasises. Frankopan's thesis challenges European-centred historical narratives by arguing that the Silk Road built the current interconnected globe. In his own words, Frankopan writes:

“In the West, we have been poorly served by our own insularity. The world may have been shaken by the consequences of the financial crisis of 2008, but the epicentre of economic power is shifting eastwards. The past is a foreign country, as the saying goes, but the east is a foreign country too: we just don't think of it that way because it is 'us'.”

Transition to “The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)”

China calls the BRI “One Belt One Road”. Sometimes called the “New Silk Road”. BRI is China's 2013 global infrastructure plan. It will invest in 150+ nations and organisations. Chinese President Xi Jinping says "it is believed to be the focal point of the country's foreign policy". BRI supports the concept of "Major Country Diplomacy" coined by Xi

Jinping. This policy has the objective of empowering China to lead global affairs as its prominence develops, like the US Marshall Plan. In August 2023, 155 countries joined the BRI. Over 75% of the globe's inhabitants and 50% of Revenue are in member countries.



Xi Jinping introduced the "Silk Road

Economic Belt" in September 2013 during his Diplomatic visit to "Kazakhstan". "Belt" means "Silk Road Economic Belt," the planned Land transportation via rail and roadways links via "landlocked Central Asia" along Western Regions' ancient trading routes. However, "road" refers to Indo-Pacific water lanes connecting the countries of Southeast Asia, South Asia, the Middle East, and the continent of Africa. BRI projects include borders, towers, highways, railways, bridges, transportation hubs, dams, coal-fired power stations, and train tunnels.

It joined the CCP Constitution in 2017. Xi Jinping describes it as Chinese effort to improve regional connectedness and embrace a more promising future. The endeavour is expected to be completed by 2049, which coincides with the country's centenary. The World Bank conducted substantial Belt and Road research. These calculations suggest that the BRI may improve international trade in 155 countries by 4.1%, cut global trade costs by 1.1-2.2%, and boost East Asian and Pacific developing nations' GDP by 2.6-3.9%. BRI will boost global GDP by \$7.1 trillion by 2040, according to London consultancy Centre for Economics and Business Research. Infrastructure will remove "frictions that hold back world trade". BRI



benefits will be "widespread." CEBR anticipates more countries to join the global infrastructure program as it grows.

Supporters of "BRI" say it might boost global GDP, especially in underdeveloped nations. The Chinese "Belt and Road Initiative" accelerates global governance change while protectionism and isolationism oppose globalisation. It promotes global governance and a shared future. More sustainable global public goods improve government ethics. The "BRI" encourages top-down and bottom-up global governance. Fourth, China's reform, economic, and stability experience informs BRI. Global government balances economic, social, ecological, and security. Countries and regions should expand together along routes that balance South-South and North-South cooperation. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) will benefit society and promote compatible justice, improving global governance in practical and intangible ways. Consulting on this effort benefits all stakeholders. Debt trap diplomacy could lead to colonialism and economic imperialism, and human rights and environmental issues are questioned. These opposing views are debated.

Conclusion

The Belt and Road Initiative's successes and failures put it at a crossroads. The global, economic, and environmental elements will define its future. As the world observes, the Belt and Road Initiative will transform economic relations between nations. Silk Route ties continue to unite nations, boosting wealth and culture. This lasting collaboration impacts future generations. This essay builds on past knowledge but emphasises the need for more research to understand how ancient rituals and trade practices affect modern life.