



THE SILK ROADS: GLOBALISATION BEFORE INDUSTRIALIZATION

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Abstract: *Our worlds were globalized by the Silk Roads millennia ago. They started in the second century BCE with commerce that flowed out of Han China, and they didn't come to a stop until the Europeans entered the spice trade in the fifteenth century BCE. Before reaching eastern, central, and western Europe, the landed Silk Roads connected modern-day China, Kazakhstan, Russia, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, India, Iran, Afghanistan, Ukraine, and Belarus. After a brief overland passage through the Arabian Peninsula, the maritime Silk Roads passed through ports that straddled modern-day Vietnam, the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Iran, and the Gulf Arab states before continuing on to Alexandria, Venice, Genoa, and Cadiz in the Mediterranean.*

Keywords: *silk road, globlization*

Introduction

Yet the Roads stood for far more than a simple geographic feature. They served as intermediaries for trade, barter, and commerce from distant eras. Despite frequent disputes and confrontations, they were also a way of life in a world of worlds that was rich in trades and flows, languages, faiths, and things. Princesses, nuns, shamans, scribes, and settlers interacted with traders, pilgrims, monks, soldiers, and nomads along the Roads. The rigorous journeys demanded interdependence, respect for wisdom and insight, learning from signs and the esoteric, as well as a fundamental level of humility and flexibility that resulted in a non-individualistic, non-predatory manner of existence.

For example, borders did not matter before the way they do now. Some areas of the Silk Roads were sought for for control by emperors, khans, sultans, and kings, but none ventured to obstruct them. To remain in power, their empires need the Roads. At the same time, the openness of borders encouraged extensive cross-cultural interactions that valued variety and distinction and often absorbed them in the most personal manner.

Such worldwide cosmopolitanism was attested to by the transmission and acceptance of major faiths like Buddhism, Islam, and Christianity as well as a wide variety of concepts, techniques, remedies, and aesthetics. A feeling of "plenty" and "richness of being" is what Feyerabend (1999) asked for in social science, and it was portrayed in literature by the Chinese classic Journey to the West (c. 1592, Xi you ji). Journey to the West condensed the vision and imagination inspired by the old Silk Roads and was based on the journals of the Buddhist monk Xuanzang, who conducted a 16-year trek from China to India—and back again in quest of the sutras.



Hence, neoliberal globalization of today is quite different from the globalization of the Silk Road. The old Silk Roads' handling of boundaries did not make what had previously been "bordered" "borderless" (Ohmae, 1990). Due to the fact that Silk-Road globalization does not call for "graduated sovereignty" and the like, as seen by the Brexit vote in Britain in 2016 and Donald Trump's election to the White House in 2017, reactionary re-assertion of national control resulted.

Also absent from Silk Road globalization was the Self-Other hierarchy that now dominates the world political economy. Neoliberalism "flattened" the world with its universalistic ideals and practices, which is why Silk Roaders did not proclaim, as did early neoliberals, that their way of life "finished" history as we knew it (Fukuyama, 1992). (Friedman, 2007). Neoliberalism, unlike the Roads, included a hegemony that was imposed on knowledge (Escobar, 1995; Kataneksza et al., forthcoming; Ling, 2017).

Most importantly, Silk Road globalization never eliminated the Other, preventing it from spreading violence. Neoliberalism is based on a subjectivity of competitive Self-accumulation versus all Others, which leads to a "West Knows Better" paradigm of global government (Ling, 2002, 2017). It reflects and continues the conquest of the Americas by Spanish explorers six centuries ago. Conquistadors declared the superiority of Western civilization when they discovered a landmass previously unknown to Europeans and claimed it for themselves by calling it the "New World" (Guerro Urea, 2004; Lajo, 2006; Rodriguez, 1999). They also enslaved the native populations there, took their lands, and exploited their resources. Rudyard Kipling bemoaned it being "the white man's burden" in 1899. Its civilizing aim was replaced by "economic development" after World War II (Escobar, 1995, 2004, 2007). Our bounded, interstate global political economy is now heavily influenced by neoliberalism, both in theory and in reality.

The Silk Roads are still important today. We think so. This belief is a result of pragmatic and normative considerations. Normatively, we want to use knowledge gained through the old Silk Roads to challenge the colonial hegemony of neoliberal globalization.

The latter provides a non hegemonic approach to combating hegemony. The Silk Roads have reemerged on the world scene pragmatically. China's President Xi Jinping unveiled a "new Silk Road" plan in 2013. The "One Belt, One Road" (OBOR) strategy, also known as the "Belt and Road Initiative," calls for about \$1 trillion in investments to construct the infrastructure of Central Asia and the Indian Ocean (BRI). His first "Belt and Road Summit" in May 2017 in Beijing confirms a session we convened on the Silk Roads for the 11th Jeju Conference for Peace and Prosperity precisely one year earlier. In reality, the Jeju Forum serves as a microcosm of the intellectual exchange that characterized the historic Silk Roads.

This special issue proceeds in the following order:

1. The Silk Road Ethos is continued by Alfonso-Antonio today. They look at the effects of language "entanglements" left behind from the old Silk Roads on China's current OBOR. Fierke and Alfonso-Antonio discover a Silk Road legacy of linguistic complexity that permits a "qualitatively distinct" sort of relationality to material concerns, drawing on Alexander Wendt's "quantum turn" in the social sciences. With "common understandings" of reciprocity, respect, and mutuality from the past, local stakeholders must thus be included in partnerships for the present and the future.

2. Alan Chong investigates one legacy of the Silk Road Ethos in "Ethical Political Economy: Lessons from the Malay world's Hikayat Abdullah (1849). In spite of and sometimes as a result of British colonial control, he relies on an alternative moral vision of economic development from Southeast Asia. Chong identifies three themes that are relevant to the maritime Silk Road from the Hikayat's perspective on politics, economics, and society: "impartial administration of law and order, beneficent autocracy, and the correct priority between money and good manners."

3. Tai Wei Lim examines another kind of Silk-Road legacy in "The Cheng Ho (Zheng He) Cultural Museum in Malacca (Melaka): Its Historical Importance and Contemporary Symbolisms," which he refers to as "Zheng He-ism." From 1405 to 1433, Zheng He (1371–1435), a Muslim admiral, ambassador, and court eunuch from Ming China, traveled by ship to Southeast Asia, South Asia, Western Asia, and East Africa. While encouraging his [non-Muslim] sailors to worship to their ancestors and venerate the Sea Goddess Mazu, Zheng, a Persian descendent living in China, adhered to Islamic beliefs. Lim describes how the Cheng Ho Cultural Museum and the International Zheng He Society, both in Malacca, continue to honor Zheng He.

4. Imad Mansour emphasizes the Arab/Muslim connections with China via the Silk Roads in "Direct and inferred impacts of the Silk Roads on the "golden period" of the Abbasid Caliphate". By doing this, he draws our attention to a section of pre-colonial international relations that Westphalian IR seldom discusses. Nonetheless, this period of history established substantial linkages between China and a major political player in the Arab and Muslim cultural spheres of the time; Mansour emphasizes that this was what made the Abbasid Caliphate's scientific and cultural life possible. These locations may cope with OBOR now with a certain resilience, if not familiarity, thanks to their historical context.

5. Naoko Kumada's book "Margin to Mainstream, Periphery to Center: Geopolitics and the Anthropology of Burma and the Silk Roads" focuses on the Silk Road Ethos' border-crossing and space-reversing customs. She examines a regional political economy in Southeast Asia that includes four provinces in modern-day China and five states in terms of today's standards (Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, and Burma) (Yunnan, Guizhou, Guangxi, and parts of Sichuan). This area has traditionally been home to a wide variety of languages, cultures, and faiths due to ongoing migration and the trade relationships that drove it. Yet local groups who oppose centralized authority are also a major contributor to this variety. So, what the "center" governing elites could see as the "periphery" would have independent "centers" of its

own. These varied positionalities inside and beyond national boundaries are now prioritized and realigned by OBOR.

6. Payal Banerjee resets the limits of social science research and teaching in "The wisdom of the road: Research and Pedagogy on India-China and the Silk Road Ethos" to take into consideration grounded research and innovative pedagogy in the social sciences influenced by a Silk Road Ethos. Banerjee outlines the precise ways in which the wisdom of the Roads carries with it unmistakable research and pedagogical possibilities, not least of which are transformations of the Self, by drawing on two recent collaborative projects, one on hydro-power projects in India and China and a second, larger project on India-China relations.

An alternate paradigm of globalization is provided by the Silk Roads. Silk Road globalization marginalizes the elements of neoliberal globalization that trouble us today: religious/cultural differences, economic disparities, military might, and epistemic hegemony. It circulates art and memory, meals and manners, as well as ideas of rebirth. A "shared humanity" is performed and materialized via Silk Road globalization. Throughout the course of 17 centuries, it did so naturally and closely.

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